

Madness in the Text:
A Study of Simone de Beauvoir's Writing Practice

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Abstract

This study, which is based on close readings of *L'Invitée*, *Les Belles Images* and *La Femme rompue*, focuses on the textual strategies that Simone de Beauvoir uses in her fiction. It shows that madness is an intrinsic quality of the text. Marks of excess, plurality, disruption and transgression are interpreted as an inscription of madness at a discursive level. Madness is discernable in the text whenever the meaningfulness of language is subverted. Chapter One, '*L'Invitée*: The Gothic Imagination', argues that, in her first novel, Simone de Beauvoir created a Gothic textual universe in order to confront pain and madness. Gothic conventions and figures are shown to inform the text. In so far as it is Gothic and transgressive the text is mad. Chapter Two, 'Continuities in Change: Imagery in *L'Invitée*, *Les Belles Images* and *La Femme rompue*', examines how madness is mediated in the text by images that evoke pain and distress and a sense of lost plenitude. Detailed readings reveal a close affinity between the symbolic landscapes of *L'Invitée* and the later fiction where excess and hyperbole persist. Chapter Three, 'Instability and Incoherence', investigates how disruptive textual strategies unsettle meaning and contribute to the creation of a mad textual universe. It demonstrates how the text subverts notions of a unified and stable identity. Temporal confusion, fragmentation and multi-layering are seen to be a source of the incoherence which exemplifies madness in the text. Traits that disrupt and destabilise the text and duplicate madness are illustrated and discussed. Analysis also reveals how disarticulated and contorted syntax is instrumental in the evocation of the anguish of madness and how syntax can convey a sense of claustrophobia and obsession. Chapter Four, 'Language and Meaning: *Les Belles Images*', locates madness in the text at those points where the meaningfulness of language is subverted. The way plurality, irony, enumeration and repetition enact madness in the text is the focus of attention. It emerges clearly from the close readings undertaken, that Simone de Beauvoir's writing is inflected by forceful emotions and disrupted and destabilised by the excess of madness.

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Madness in the Text: A Study of Simone de Beauvoir's Writing Practice

Introduction

This study of Simone de Beauvoir's fiction will focus on her writing practice, on her textual strategies. I want to examine *how* she tells the stories she tells and intend to demonstrate that madness is inherent in the text, in the very telling of the stories.

On the whole, Simone de Beauvoir's fiction in general and her writing practice in particular have been neglected, a fact that has not gone unnoticed. Elaine Marks tells us that 'during the forty-five years in which Simone de Beauvoir has been written about in newspapers, literary magazines, women's magazines, scholarly journals, and specifically feminist journals and books, the major emphasis has been on her autobiographical writings and on her substantial essays on women and old age'.¹ She identifies a need for more work on close textual analyses (p. 11). Elizabeth Fallaize points out that 'the majority of the studies dealing with the fictional work have given at least as much attention to her essays and/ or autobiographical writings'.² She adds that studies that deal with the fiction tend to focus on theme and content, rather to the exclusion of a consideration of form (p. 3). Likewise, Toril Moi regrets that little attention has been paid to the style of Simone de Beauvoir's writing.³

This present study of Simone de Beauvoir is positioned precisely in this 'gap' where fiction and form intersect. My own readings, however, have not emerged in a vacuum. They are intended not to silence other interpretations but to exist in dialogue

¹ Marks, Elaine, 'Introduction', in *Critical Essays on Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. by Elaine Marks, Boston, Massachusetts: G.K. Hall, 1987, p. 8. This book is a case in point. Only two of the contributions deal with the fiction. In 'Metaphysics and the Novel', Maurice Merleau-Ponty offers a reading of *L'Invitée* (pp. 31-44) and in 'Psychiatry in the Postwar Fiction of Simone de Beauvoir', Terry Keefe examines *Les Mandarins*, *La Femme rompue* and *Les Belles Images* (pp. 131-44).

² Fallaize, Elizabeth, *The Novels of Simone de Beauvoir*, London: Routledge, 1988, p. 2.

³ Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1994. See for example, footnote 16 p. 269.

with them, for Simone de Beauvoir's complex and ambiguous texts generate multiple readings, none of which is definitive or exclusive. With this in mind, it will be useful to consider the current state of Beauvoir criticism, before going on to examine the relationship between madness and the text in detail.

Toril Moi provides a useful overview of full-length studies on Simone de Beauvoir published in French and English from 1958 to 1992.⁴ She divides the studies into 'impressionistic' categories: catholic, existentialist/ socialist, scholarly, popular, and feminist. Between 1980 (when Beauvoir studies shifted away from France) and 1992, twenty-one studies were published. Five of these were 'scholarly', six were 'popular' and ten were 'feminist'. Of these studies only two were dedicated to Simone de Beauvoir's fiction, one 'scholarly', one 'feminist'.⁵ Five books look at the fiction in the context of Simone de Beauvoir's writings as a whole.⁶ Jane Heath's feminist study reads *L'Invitée*, *Les Mandarins* and *Les Belles Images* together with the autobiographies, according to Toril Moi, in an attempt to 'rescue Beauvoir for poststructuralist feminism' (p. 77).⁷ Other studies whose concerns are political or philosophical, examine the fiction to a much lesser extent.⁸ Since 1992, none of the major studies of Simone de Beauvoir that have been published, focuses exclusively on the fiction, although Toril Moi's 'personal genealogy' of Simone de Beauvoir provides

⁴ Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, footnote 8 pp. 267-68.

⁵ They are: Hibbs, Françoise Arnaud, *L'Espace dans les romans de Simone de Beauvoir: son expression et sa fonction*, Stanford French and Italian Studies 59, Saratoga, California: Anna Libri, 1989, ('scholarly'); Fallaize, *The Novels*, ('feminist').

⁶ They are: Ascher, Carol, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Life of Freedom*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1981, a feminist study described by Toril Moi as verging on the adulatory; Keefe, Terry, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Study of her Writings*, London: Harrap, 1983; Marks, Elaine ed., *Critical Essays on Simone de Beauvoir*; Brosman, Catherine Savage, *Simone de Beauvoir Revisited*, Twayne's World Authors Series 820, Boston: Twayne, 1991. Toril Moi classifies these three studies as 'scholarly'. The fifth study, this one in Toril Moi's 'popular' category, is: Winegarten, Renée, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Critical View*, Oxford: Berg, 1988.

⁷ Heath, Jane, *Simone de Beauvoir*, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989.

⁸ For example, Evans, Mary, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Feminist Mandarin*, London: Tavistock, 1985; Okely, Judith, *Simone de Beauvoir*, London: Virago, 1986. See also Simons, Margaret A., ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Simone de Beauvoir*, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995.

an exciting reading of *L'Invitée* and certainly underlines the importance of her rhetorical strategies.

A number of critics comment on the disappointed, not to say hostile tone of much Beauvoir criticism. Elaine Marks notes that at least half of the critical essays included in the collection she edited are 'sarcastic' to some degree. She asserts: 'They present Simone de Beauvoir as a slightly ridiculous figure, naive in her passions, sloppy in her scholarship, inaccurate in her documentation, generally out of her depth and inferior as a writer' (p. 2). She is criticised for being 'too feminist' and, paradoxically, for being 'not feminist enough'. Elaine Marks argues that theoretical divergence between Simone de Beauvoir and contemporary feminists results in hostility and debate becoming conflated. Elizabeth Fallaize also comments on the disappointment of readers who seek in the fiction a confirmation of *Le Deuxième sexe* or a reflection of contemporary feminist thought (p. 3). Toril Moi investigates the perception that Simone de Beauvoir is an undistinguished writer and devotes a chapter of her book to a close examination of recurring themes in hostile responses to Simone de Beauvoir's work, responses that are surprisingly common even among critics who profess to be well-intentioned and unbiased.⁹ She asserts that 'the hostile critics' favourite strategy is to personalize the issues, to reduce the book to the woman: their aim is clearly to discredit her as a speaker not to enter into debate with her' (p. 75). Certainly, it is not the case that Simone de Beauvoir should be above criticism. However, appraisal must be based on careful reading. When it comes to the fiction, dismissive comments as to the literary merits of Simone de Beauvoir's writing by critics who have barely engaged with the text are regrettable to say the least.

⁹ Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, Chapter 3, 'Politics and the Intellectual Woman: Clichés and Commonplaces in the reception of Simone de Beauvoir', pp. 73-92.

In *Simone de Beauvoir: A Study of her Writings*, Terry Keefe regrets the fact that much of the work done on Simone de Beauvoir has centered on her feminism or her association with Jean-Paul Sartre, thus producing a distorted view of her as a writer.¹⁰ He intends his study to be a balanced study of all her books, although his readings of the fiction centre on an interpretation of content and character and little space is given to form. When form is addressed, it is generally narrative techniques that merit a brief mention. For example, he comments on shifting narrative viewpoints in *L'Invitée* but neglects other aspects of Simone de Beauvoir's writing. His relative neglect of form leads him to consider that the novel is somewhat long and repetitive and to find that this is justified only in so far as it reflects the shapelessness and texture of life itself (pp. 157-58). He does not consider the effect that recurring events may have (apart from inferring that it is boring) and neglects symbolic significance that accrues as the text gathers momentum. Just over one page is allotted to a discussion of what Terry Keefe refers to as the 'small scale stylistic devices' that Simone de Beauvoir uses in *Les Belles Images* to convey Laurence's state of mind (p. 211). His analysis leaves much room for development; for example, he alludes to the single viewpoint in the novel but fails to point out that there are in fact two narrative voices, a split between 'je' and 'elle' at the heart of the narrative.¹¹ Likewise, Keefe links the state of mind of Murielle, the narrator in 'Monologue', the middle story in *La Femme rompue*, to the use of language in the story but does not develop the connection thoroughly, commenting only that erratic punctuation conveys the idea that words are whirling round in Murielle's head and that the intensity of her feelings is straining language to its limits (p. 216). There is no other mention of form in *La Femme rompue*. Despite this relative lack of analysis of form,

¹⁰ Keefe, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Study of her Writings*, Preface.

¹¹ I will be investigating this in Chapter Three.

Keefe levels severe criticisms at Simone de Beauvoir's fiction and concludes that its aesthetic defects might make us 'disinclined even to consider whether they are accomplished works of art' (p. 229). Whilst acknowledging that *Les Belles Images* and 'Monologue' reveal her to be capable 'of the highest achievements on the artistic level', he nevertheless attacks her fiction for its narrow range, for failure to make more use of conflicting perspectives, for lack of inventiveness, for Simone de Beauvoir's overidentification with its heroines and for being limited and conventional (pp. 227-28). His praise can seem patronising and begrudging:

Whatever the flaws in her books, we can only be grateful for stories that not only entertain us, but project us so firmly into the mentalities of imaginary figures that our awareness of people and the real world is permanently enriched, over however narrow a range.¹²

(*Simone de Beauvoir: A Study of her Writings*, p. 228.)

Terry Keefe's introductory guide to *Les Belles Images* and *La Femme rompue*, published in 1991, provides a more thoughtful appreciation of Simone de Beauvoir's later fiction.¹³ A whole section is devoted to narrative technique and style in *Les Belles Images*. He touches on a whole range of stylistic devices (focalization, reliability, use of pronouns and tense, repetition, questioning, use of parentheses and suspension points and ambiguity), concluding that 'the style of the novel would undoubtedly repay closer study' (p. 36). Less attention is paid to the form of the three stories in *La Femme rompue*. The 'broadly literary orientation of 'L'Age de discrétion' is noted, and Terry Keefe comments that 'the style itself has certain minor poetic qualities not entirely common in Beauvoir's fiction' (p. 44). These are not explored. The remainder of the

¹² Keefe appears to associate the lack of a broader perspective and more balanced treatment with the absence of male focalizers in the shorter fiction (p. 221). He also makes the following strange comment: 'There has been a tendency, perhaps because of her relationship with Sartre, to expect too much of Beauvoir's works [...]' (p. 228).

¹³ Keefe, Terry, *Simone de Beauvoir: Les Belles Images, La Femme rompue*, Glasgow Introductory Guides to French Literature 12, Glasgow: University of Glasgow French and German Publications, 1991.

paragraph dealing with style is given over to a brief consideration of the use of the 'diary' form in the story. The form of 'Monologue' is treated somewhat more thoroughly and is related to the mental illness of Murielle, the narrator, although his argument appears to be somewhat contradictory in that, whilst the story is considered to be 'a successful attempt to project us into the strange mentality of a tortured woman', the monologue form is seen to hamper our efforts to judge Murielle (p. 52). Likewise, the diary form in 'La Femme rompue' is acknowledged to be well suited to the depiction of a character undergoing change but it too, is perceived as a barrier to making 'a sound judgement' (p. 61). No other aspect of the form of 'La Femme rompue' is examined.¹⁴

Renee Winegarten's declared aim is to 'assess the value of Simone de Beauvoir's activity and writings in the spheres of feminism, politics and literature'.¹⁵ Her starting point is that 'basically, [Simone de Beauvoir] was not an inventive or highly imaginative writer' (p. 3). There is no careful evaluation of Simone de Beauvoir's writing in her book; instead, she concentrates on philosophical and autobiographical aspects of the fiction, concluding that Simone de Beauvoir's lack of inventive powers led her to write *romans à clef* and *romans à thèse* (p. 105). Her comments are consistently dismissive and unfounded. One page is allotted to *Les Belles Images*; she considers this to be Simone de Beauvoir's 'most accomplished work of fiction in the formal sense' (p. 114) but restricts herself to summarising the plot. Her verdict is that 'skilfully and smoothly constructed as it is, the novel seems thin and the

¹⁴ In 1991 Keefe continues to regret the fact that Simone de Beauvoir's stories are narrated exclusively from the woman's point of view. As regards the upbringing of children in *Les Belles Images* and *La Femme rompue*, he argues, we are prevented from 'seeing things through the father's eyes, and therefore from making a balanced judgement on the father's contribution to the upbringing process' (p. 72). (This seems especially to concern Keefe in light of the fact that the stories in *La Femme rompue* 'are cautionary tales, warning against the unreliability of certain women's testimony'.)

¹⁵ Winegarten, *Simone de Beauvoir*, p. 6.

plot mechanism artificial' (p. 115).¹⁶ *La Femme rompue* is summed up and dismissed in ten lines (p. 115). My argument here is that, if critics claim to evaluate Simone de Beauvoir's fiction and her contribution to literature, then the least they owe is a careful reading of the texts.¹⁷

Jane Heath's study of three of Simone de Beauvoir's fictional works and her autobiographies focus 'on textuality not personality'.¹⁸ By placing emphasis on the process of the fictional texts she seeks to examine the way in which the feminine in the texts, defined as a site of resistance, represents a challenge to the patriarchal order (pp. 8, 13, 14). She argues that Simone de Beauvoir is inscribed on the side of the masculine, speaking 'predominantly the discourse of repression' and allowing the man in her to speak (p. 9). However, in spite of repression of the feminine, Jane Heath tells us, the feminine returns to the texts. She offers interesting psychoanalytical readings of the fiction but I share Toril Moi's disquiet at her use of the notions femininity and masculinity.¹⁹ Much of what she reads as the feminine, my readings will reinterpret as madness in the text.

Catherine Savage Brosman looks at Simone de Beauvoir's fiction in the context of her work as a whole in *Simone de Beauvoir Revisited*. One chapter deals with the early fiction and drama and another with the later fiction. The Publisher's Note promises 'an objective consideration of Simone de Beauvoir's lasting contribution to literature and philosophy'. Indeed, Catherine Brosman's study is intended to fill the gap left by studies she considers to be overspecialised or 'unbalanced', arguing that 'this is the case

¹⁶ She adds the following, rather odd remark: 'All is weighted against the majority of Laurence's circle, and the battle seems won in advance' (p. 115).

¹⁷ I have not included Carol Ascher's book in this review. Her aim is 'to render the character, preoccupations, and main themes of de Beauvoir's life — as [she] see[s] them' (p. 3).

¹⁸ Heath, *Simone de Beauvoir*, p. 3.

¹⁹ See Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, footnote 27 pp. 272-73.

particularly with the numerous studies done from the feminist viewpoint'.²⁰ Although she claims to treat Simone de Beauvoir's fictional technique in detail, little space is actually given over to it. For instance, barely more than one page is devoted to the form of *L'Invitée* and one paragraph of this is concerned with showing that autobiographical considerations weigh more heavily than questions of style (p. 55). Likewise, just one page deals with the form of *Les Belles Images* (p. 88) and there is one paragraph given over to the consideration of form in each of the stories in *La Femme rompue* (pp. 94, 95, 98). When technique is dealt with, focalization is the aspect concentrated on. The tone of Catherine Brosman's study is hostile, begrudging and dismissive. Her estimate of the portrait of Xavière in *L'Invitée*, for example, is that 'she may be the book's most successful portrait, and credit is due to Beauvoir, even though she had a live model' (p. 52). As for Simone de Beauvoir's technique, Catherine Brosman writes: 'The progress the author had made in storytelling since her early attempts is visible in *L'Invitée*. Thanks perhaps to Sartre's influence, Beauvoir had a sense of what technique could contribute to her fiction. [...] The fact that two initial chapters had to be excised, on an editor's advice, suggests that the craftsmanship in the manuscript was not perfect' (p. 55).²¹ Such comments recur throughout the study which, though it can provide insights, also contains curious, unsubstantiated readings and misreadings of the texts.²² Some of

²⁰ Brosman, *Simone de Beauvoir Revisited*, Preface, p. ix.

²¹ Brosman neglects to mention that these chapters were 'excised' from an early draft of the first hundred pages of what would be *L'Invitée*. Simone de Beauvoir discusses the genesis of her novel in *La Force de l'âge*, p. 346. (The two chapters appear in *Les Écrits*, pp. 275-316.)

²² For example, Brosman writes that in *L'Invitée* Françoise and Pierre bring Xavière to Paris to pursue her philosophical studies (p. 51). In fact, Pierre's first idea is that she should learn shorthand (*L'Invitée*, p. 27). Brosman offers a strange interpretation of the ending of *Les Belles Images*: 'Laurence's task is enormous: to bring all her intimates to a common recognition of freedom and creation of an authentic self. There is some hope that she can do so for and with Catherine' (p. 92). It is hard to reconcile this with the tentative, personal 'resolution' reached in the final sentences of the novel: 'Mais les enfants auront leur chance. Quelle chance? elle ne le sait même pas' (p. 183). Brosman does not provide textual evidence that Monique in 'La Femme rompue' 'was indeed an oppressive mother' (p. 99). Certainly Monique expresses doubts about the way she brought up her children in the light of Maurice's criticism (pp. 186, 219) but for conflicting evidence see pp. 188, 250.

these will be dealt with during the course of my study. In particular, I want to show that her assertion that the tone of *Les Belles Images* is detached is untenable.²³

Toril Moi's book *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* offers a close reading of 'the textual Simone de Beauvoir'. She makes no methodological distinction between 'life' and 'text'; 'Simone de Beauvoir' is a construction, the effect of the fictional, philosophical, autobiographical and epistolary texts that she herself wrote and of all the texts that have been written about her (p. 4). For Toril Moi, all of these texts participate in the same discursive network and she aims 'to read them all with and against each other in order to bring out their points of tension, contradictions and similarities (p. 5).²⁴ She focuses on *L'Invitée*, *Le Deuxième sexe* and the memoirs and her book is a dazzling combination not only of biography and literary criticism but also 'reception studies, sociology of culture, philosophical analysis, psychoanalytic inquiry and feminist theory' (p. 7). Attention is paid to Simone de Beauvoir's rhetorical strategies; *L'Invitée* is read as an existential melodrama and its powerful imagery analysed; the use of metaphor and metonymy in Simone de Beauvoir's account of subjectivity and sexuality in *Le Deuxième sexe* is investigated; shifts in tone and style in the memoirs are read as effects of anxiety and depression. On balance, the emphasis in Toril Moi's study falls on psychoanalytic and philosophical readings of the texts. I am interested in developing her ideas on imagery and language in relation to Simone de Beauvoir's early and late fiction.

²³ Brosman, p. 86.

²⁴ Toril Moi acknowledges what she call the 'ethical integrity' of 'purely aesthetic' approaches to Simone de Beauvoir but regrets that they tend to miss the 'real cultural significance' of her work by concentrating on her as a writer of fiction (p. 5). However, given the dearth of studies that deal with the form of the fiction in any depth, it seems appropriate that, within the context of recognised cultural significance, effort should be devoted to an evaluation of Simone de Beauvoir's writing in the fiction, to the appraisal of 'how' she writes. This is not to preclude comparable studies of non-fictional works.

In her study of Simone de Beauvoir's fiction, Elizabeth Fallaize concentrates on Simone de Beauvoir as a writer and intends to make up for the relative lack of attention that has been paid to the formal literary qualities of her work until now.²⁵ In particular, she is interested in the narrative strategies Simone de Beauvoir uses in her novels and short stories and wishes to relate these both to the meaning of her texts and to the sexual politics of her writing (p. 1). She points out in the introduction to her book that narrative strategies will figure much more prominently in her discussion of certain texts where language is foregrounded than in others where philosophical, political and personal concerns are dominant (p. 4).

In her discussion of *L'Invitée* Elizabeth Fallaize considers the implications of narrative techniques for the psychology of the characters and thematic/ plot development. Thus, she argues, switches in focalization are intended to allow external views of Françoise (p. 27). Her treatment of *Les Mandarins* also raises important questions to do with narrative voice; during her analysis Elizabeth Fallaize notes the emergence of a female narrative voice (p. 90) and the 'accent on suffering, folly and death' within Anne's monologue (p. 114). *Les Belles Images* is often considered to be Simone de Beauvoir's most literary novel. This is reflected in the fact that Elizabeth Fallaize devotes a good deal of her chapter on *Les Belles Images* to a consideration of narrative voice and language. She reads the narrative split in *Les Belles Images* as a split between a first person narrator, Laurence, and a third person external narrator and interprets this as an expression of 'the unequal struggle between Laurence's fragile subjectivity and the weight of social structures' (p.125). I should like to pursue an alternative reading, suggesting that Laurence is narrating her own story throughout the text and that the je/ elle split figures rather Laurence's crisis and her sense of alienation

²⁵ Fallaize, *The Novels*, p. 3.

from herself. My analyses will build on Elizabeth Fallaize's exploration of Simone de Beauvoir's narrative strategies.

Elizabeth Fallaize notes that meaning is subverted in *Les Belles Images* (p. 126) and I should like to expand her analysis and consider the implications of this, distinguishing between text and story; between the ideological use of language by characters belonging to a specific class and the way the text itself undermines meaning. Elizabeth Fallaize implies that the nature of meaning is also posited as problematic in the stories collected in *La Femme rompue* (pp. 160, 166-67). For her, the stories collected in *La Femme rompue* are narratives of bad faith and the women narrating their own stories are deceiving themselves, using discourses to conceal their situation from themselves (pp. 154-55). This reading is based on the premise that there exists a true, correct version of their stories that they are too blind or perhaps too wilful to see. Elizabeth Fallaize adopts the 'detective stance' advocated by Simone de Beauvoir and, reducing the texts to a coherent narrative, tells us what really happened. A quite different reading is also possible, one which sees the women in the process of constructing reality. Far from positing a true version of events against which to measure the bad faith of the narrators, the text can be shown to question the very notions of truth and reality. I shall be exploring this later.

In Simone de Beauvoir's fiction as a whole, Elizabeth Fallaize identifies an overall reduction in plurality and a loss of authority conceded to the female voice which, however, becomes the dominant voice. She notes that gradually the narrative voice is taken over by negative, mad women and asks the crucial question as to how the connection between women and folly and the abuse of words can be accounted for (p. 179). Interesting autobiographical and historical points are advanced to explain developments in Simone de Beauvoir's narrative strategies. My readings of Simone de

Beauvoir will develop Fallaize's insights into Simone de Beauvoir's narrative strategies by addressing the connections between madness and language in the text. I shall explore the textual strategies that call into question the meaningfulness of language and the nature of truth.

Françoise Arnaud Hibbs's study, *L'Espace dans les romans de Simone de Beauvoir: son expression et sa fonction*, examines the way Simone de Beauvoir uses space in her novels, showing how different spaces are presented a number of times from different points of view and at different points in the narrative and how these spaces change: 'Un même lieu sera l'objet de descriptions multiples. Sa réalité n'apparaîtra au lecteur que comme une série de possibilités; de façon idéale une synthèse même ne devrait pas s'imposer à lui'.²⁶ She goes on to analyse the meanings Simone de Beauvoir attaches to space in her novels and autobiographies and identifies what she refers to as 'la dialectique du cercle et de la ligne' (p. 84). She argues that characters break out of/ open up the luminous circle of consciousness and the threat of nothingness through action which is 'un mouvement linéaire' (p. 94) and that 'la dialectique du cercle et de la ligne traduit la confrontation permanente entre clôture et ouverture, passivité et action, limites et liberté' (p. 110). In Françoise Hibbs's study, the treatment of space provides a starting point for raising philosophical, metaphysical and psychological considerations.

This review of major critical studies of Simone de Beauvoir's work that consider her fiction to some degree, reveals that there is a place for further analysis of her fiction. It confirms that the form of her novels and short stories remains a relatively neglected area of study. Attention here will therefore centre on text as opposed to story and

²⁶ Hibbs, *L'Espace dans les romans de Simone de Beauvoir*, Stanford French and Italian Studies 59, Saratoga, California: Anma Libri, 1989, p. 10.

narration. These are the labels used by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan for the the basic aspects of narrative fiction.²⁷ They correspond to Genette's distinction between *histoire*, *récit* and *narration*.²⁸ 'Story' denotes the narrated events and the participants in these events, 'le contenu narratif', however minimal. 'Text' denotes the discourse, spoken or written, that tells the story. 'Narration' denotes the act or process of production, the communication of the narrative by a fictional narrator within the text. All three aspects are essential and interrelated. To base an evaluation of narrative fiction on an appreciation of story only, that is an examination of events and characters, is evidently partial. To a great extent, the how of the telling is the meaning of the story.

Simone de Beauvoir attached a great deal of importance to the artistic reworking of lived experience, to the creative process. She did not simply transcribe lived experience in her fiction. In a lecture she gave in Japan in 1966, when the bulk of her fiction was already written, she told her listeners: 'Écrire un roman, c'est en quelque sorte pulvériser le monde réel et n'en retenir que les éléments qu'on pourra introduire dans une re-crédation d'un monde imaginaire [...]. Un roman c'est une espèce de machine qu'on fabrique pour éclairer le sens de notre être dans le monde'.²⁹ The transposition of experience into fiction, the creation of *une oeuvre littéraire* required attention to be paid to form. Toril Moi quotes the diary entry in *La Force des choses* where Simone de Beauvoir writes that for the lifeless sentences that transcribe her life to become a real work, she would have to pay attention to how she told the story, to 'la façon de raconter'.³⁰ She does not have the time to rework her diary entries, she says, but elsewhere in *La Force des choses* she describes the long, painstaking process of

²⁷ Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, London: Methuen, 1983, pp. 3-4.

²⁸ Genette, Gérard, 'Discours du récit', in *Figures III*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972, p. 72.

²⁹ Beauvoir, 'Mon expérience d'écrivain', Conférence donnée au Japon, le 11 octobre 1966, in Francis, Claude and Fernande Gontier, *Les Écrits de Simone de Beauvoir: La vie - L'écriture*, Paris: Gallimard, 1979, p. 443.

³⁰ *La Force des choses*, quoted in Moi, Toril, *Simone de Beauvoir*, p. 247.

reworking the drafts of her books; the initial writing, 'un labeur pénible'; the second draft, '[le] brouillon'; and then the final rewriting:

M'aidant de mon brouillon, je rédige à grands traits un chapitre. Je reprends la première page et arrivée en bas, je la refais phrase par phrase; ensuite je corrige chaque phrase d'après l'ensemble de la page, chaque page d'après le chapitre entier; plus tard, chaque chapitre, chaque page, chaque phrase d'après la totalité du livre.

(*La Force des choses*, p. 294.)³¹

In her contribution to the 1964 debate, *Que peut la littérature*, Simone de Beauvoir is categorical that in literature, which is essentially an exploration/ a search ('une recherche'), 'la distinction entre le fond et la forme est périmée; et les deux sont inséparables'.³² She goes on to say: 'On ne peut pas séparer la manière de raconter et ce qui est raconté, parce que la manière de raconter c'est le rythme même de la recherche, c'est la manière de la définir, c'est la manière de la vivre'.³³ Given the importance Simone de Beauvoir attached to form, given the care she took with the writing of her fiction, with the craft of writing, this aspect of her work deserves close examination.³⁴

Consideration of Simone de Beauvoir's writing practice is amply rewarded. Not only does it reveal the richness of her texts, it can also afford alternative readings of her early and late fiction. These may be deconstructive readings that undermine authorial readings of the texts.

³¹ The whole process is described in 'Intermède', *La Force des choses*, pp. 293-95.

³² In *Que peut la littérature*, ed. by Yves Buin, Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1965, pp. 73-92 (p. 84).

³³ *Que peut la littérature*, p. 85. See also Simone de Beauvoir's comments in the interview with Catherine David, 'Beauvoir elle-même', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 22 January 1979, pp 82-90, (p. 88-89). In response to the interviewer's remark that style does not seem to be of great importance to her, Simone de Beauvoir replies: 'Au contraire, j'y attache une grande importance. Je travaille énormément tout ce que j'écris. Vous savez, pour émouvoir, il faut que les choses soient dites d'une certaine façon, avec un certain ton, des ellipses, des images, des développements. Ça a toujours beaucoup compté pour moi. [...] Dans mes romans et mes Mémoires, je fais toujours très attention à la manière dont je dis les choses, On ne peut évidemment pas séparer la manière du contenu'.

³⁴ Simone de Beauvoir states that some essays can also be described as works of literature to the extent that 'dans l'essai même il y a un style, une écriture, une construction; on communique aussi à travers ce qu'il y a de commun et de désinformatif dans le langage'. 'Mon expérience', p. 441.

Before going further, it will be useful at this point to examine some of the author's own views with regard to her fiction. Simone de Beauvoir knew (thought she knew) what her texts meant. Her intentions are, in each case, clearly spelt out in her memoirs.³⁵ Toril Moi has pointed out how 'the autobiography becomes a repertoire of *authorized* readings', as Simone de Beauvoir attempts to control the meaning of her books.³⁶ Martha Noel Evans also discusses the way in which Simone de Beauvoir's fiction is 'documented and shadowed' by her memoirs.³⁷ She sees the autobiography as 'a second writing that explains, completes, and justifies the first' (p. 77). Simone de Beauvoir's memoirs reveal a tension between her desire to control the meaning of her texts, particularly her fictional texts, and her wish to leave room for a certain ambiguity she intended to guarantee *vraisemblance* (in life there is no closure, no certainty, no Truth).

About *L'Invitée* she writes: 'Dans les passages réussis du roman, on arrive à une ambiguïté de significations qui correspond à celle qu'on rencontre dans la réalité' (*La Force de l'âge*, p.352). She quotes with approval what Blanchot says about existence in his essay on *le roman à thèse*: 'Le but de l'écrivain c'est de *la donner à voir* en la recréant avec des mots: il la trahit, il l'appauvrit, s'il n'en respecte pas l'ambiguïté' (*La Force de l'âge*, pp.558-59). This is Simone de Beauvoir's declared reason for preferring *L'Invitée* to *Le Sang des autres*, because 'la fin en demeure ouverte; on ne saurait en tirer aucune leçon' (*La Force de l'âge*, p.559), whereas, *Le Sang des autres* 'aboutit à

³⁵ *L'Invitée* in *La Force de l'âge*, pp. 347-53; *Le Sang des autres* in *La Force de l'âge*, pp. 555-58; *Tous les hommes sont mortels* in *La Force des choses*, pp. 75-9; *Les Mandarins* in *La Force des choses*, pp. 283-92; *Les Belles Images*, in *Tout compte fait*, pp. 171-75; *La Femme rompue*, in *Tout compte fait*, pp. 175-81.

³⁶ Moi, Toril, 'Intentions and Effects: Rhetoric and Identification in Simone de Beauvoir's "The Woman Destroyed"', in *Feminist Theory and Simone de Beauvoir*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1990, p. 67.

³⁷ Evans, Martha Noel, *Masks of Tradition: Women and the Politics of Writing in Twentieth-Century France*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987, p. 76. She contends that Simone de Beauvoir establishes a hierarchy in which the (masculine) commentary takes precedence over the (feminine) fiction and relates this to what she defines as Simone de Beauvoir's ambivalent views of fiction that are, in turn, linked with her ambivalence towards her gender.

une conclusion univoque, réductible en maximes et en concepts' (*La Force de l'âge*, p.559). Simone de Beauvoir is even more critical of her text than Blanchot, writing: 'Le défaut qu'il dénonce n'entache pas seulement les dernières pages du roman: d'un bout à l'autre, il lui est inhérent (*La Force de l'âge*, p.559). Ambiguity is what Simone de Beauvoir values in *Tous les hommes sont mortels*:

En le relisant je me suis demandé: mais qu'est-ce que j'ai voulu dire? Je n'ai voulu dire rien d'autre que l'aventure que j'inventai. Le récit se conteste sans répit; si on prétendait en tirer des allégations, elles se contrediraient; aucun point de vue ne prévaut définitivement; celui de Fosca, celui d'Armand sont vrais ensemble. J'aurais dit dans mon précédent essai que la dimension des entreprises humaines n'est ni le fini ni l'infini, mais l'indéfini: ce mot ne se laisse enfermer dans aucune limite fixe, la meilleure manière de l'approcher, c'est de divaguer sur ses possibles variations. *Tous les hommes sont mortels*, c'est cette divagation organisée; les thèmes n'y sont pas des thèses mais des départs vers d'incertains vagabondages.

(*La Force des choses*, p.79.)

Indeed, for Simone de Beauvoir, ambiguity is at the heart of the literary enterprise. This is what she writes in *La Force des choses*: 'J'ai dit déjà quel est pour moi un des rôles essentiels de la littérature: manifester des vérités ambiguës, séparées, contradictoires, qu'aucun moment ne totalise ni hors de moi, ni en moi; en certains cas on ne réussit à les ressembler qu'en les inscrivant dans l'unité d'un objet imaginaire' (pp.282-83).³⁸

Rejecting the idea that *Les Mandarins* is *un roman à thèse*, she writes:

La confrontation — existence, néant — ébauchée à vingt ans dans mon journal intime, poursuivie à travers tous mes livres et jamais achevée, n'aboutit ici non plus à aucune réponse sûre. J'ai montré des gens en proie à des espoirs et à des doutes, cherchant à tâtons leur chemin. Je me demande bien ce que j'ai démontré.
(*La Force des choses*, p. 290.)

Simone de Beauvoir's comments here are in line with the conception of fiction as a process of discovery for author and readers alike, a conception developed in 'Littérature et métaphysique' where she writes:

³⁸ See also 'Mon expérience' in Francis and Gontier, *Les Écrits*, p. 447. Simone de Beauvoir told her listeners: 'Il s'agit, dans un roman, de donner à voir l'existence dans ses ambiguïtés, dans ses contradictions. L'existence est détotalisée, toujours inachevée, toujours à reprendre, l'existence ne conclut jamais'.

Or ceci exige que le romancier participe lui-même à cette recherche à laquelle il convie son lecteur: s'il prévoit d'avance les conclusions auxquelles celui-ci doit aboutir, s'il fait pression sur lui pour lui arracher son adhésion à des thèses préétablies, s'il ne lui accorde qu'une illusion de liberté, alors l'oeuvre romanesque n'est qu'une mystification incongrue; le roman ne revêt sa valeur et sa dignité que s'il constitue pour l'auteur comme pour le lecteur une découverte vivante.

(*'Littérature et métaphysique'*, p109.)³⁹

Like the pursuit of ambiguity, Simone de Beauvoir's acknowledgement that readers play a role in the creation of meaning can also appear to stand in contradiction to her desire to control the meaning of her books. In view of the severity with which she criticises her readers (I shall come back to this shortly), it is somewhat surprising to find her writing, 'un livre est un objet collectif: les lecteurs contribuent autant que l'auteur à le créer [...]' (*La Force des choses*, pp.49-50).⁴⁰ It is an idea echoed in her preface to Anne Ophir's book, *Regards féminins: condition féminine et création littéraire*, when she acknowledges with gratitude that, although she set out to reveal the *mauvaise foi* of her heroines in *La Femme rompue*, she had been shown how her texts ('récits') 'pouvaient être envisagés sous de tout autres aspects'. She tells us: 'Anne Ophir m'a fait faire des découvertes' and asserts: 'Qu'une étude critique apporte à son écrivain des lumières inattendues sur son travail, je pense que c'est le plus grand éloge qu'on puisse faire'.⁴¹ In fact, this is an attitude that appears early in Simone de Beauvoir's career. Comments she makes about the reception of *L'Invitée* are revealing; Simone de Beauvoir recognised that her book was now beyond her control, yet was happy with this state of affairs only insofar as it was interpreted in line with her intentions:

³⁹ 'Littérature et métaphysique' in *Existentialisme et la sagesse des nations*, Paris: Nagel, 1948, pp. 103-24.

⁴⁰ Sartre echoes these sentiments in his contribution to the debate on literature published in *Que peut la littérature?*. He argues that an author depends on his readers to find out what he has actually written: 'L'objet qu'il a fait lui est renvoyé autre qu'il n'a cru le faire, par les lecteurs, parce que précisément il y a création dans la lecture' (p. 119).

⁴¹ Preface to Ophir, Anne, *Regards féminins: condition féminine et création littéraire*, Paris: Denoël/Gontier, 1976. [Pages not numbered.] Reprinted in Francis and Gontier, *Écrits*, pp. 577-79.

Je lus avec un agréable étonnement les remarques que fit Thierry Maulnier [...]: je les trouvai justes et elles me prenaient au dépourvu; mon livre possédait donc l'épaisseur d'un objet: dans une certaine mesure, il m'échappait. Cependant j'eus plaisir aussi à constater qu'il n'avait pas trahi mes intentions. .

(*La Force de l'âge*, p. 571.)

It is already clear from these comments that the freedom accorded to readers was to be strictly limited.

Simone de Beauvoir was confident that she had said what she meant to say. In the light of this, the extent to which her texts are read differently than she intended, 'misread' and 'misunderstood' in her terms, is striking. In her memoirs she repeatedly deplores the fact that her readers have, once again, failed to understand her message. She sets out to correct misconceptions and is careful to tell us exactly what we would have understood if only we had read more carefully. This is what she writes in *La Force des choses* about the reception of her second novel:

Le Sang des autres parut en septembre; le thème principal en était, je l'ai dit, le paradoxe de cette existence vécue par moi comme ma liberté et saisie comme objet par ceux qui m'approchent. Ces intentions échappèrent au public; le livre fut catalogué «un roman sur la résistance».

Par moment, ce malentendu m'agaça...

(*La Force des choses*, p.49.)

Unfortunately, Simone de Beauvoir was equally disappointed by the reception of *Les Mandarins*. She rejects the idea that it is a *roman à clé* and goes on to write: 'J'aurais souhaité qu'on prenne ce livre pour ce qu'il est; ni une autobiographie, ni un reportage: une évocation' (*La Force des choses*, p.289). In her memoirs Simone de Beauvoir appears extremely defensive as regards *Le Deuxième sexe*, justifiably so, perhaps, in the light of the bitter reactions it provoked.⁴² She was convinced that her book had been misunderstood: 'je souhaite que *Le Deuxième sexe* soit compris tel que je l'ai écrit' (*La Force des choses*, p.207); 'Mes adversaires créèrent et entretenirent autour du *Deuxième*

⁴² See *La Force des choses*, pp.203-11.

sexe de nombreux malentendus' (*La Force des choses*, p.209); 'Mal lu, mal compris, il agitait les esprits' (*La Force des choses*, p.210).

Simone de Beauvoir was aware of the risks involved in the new textual strategies she adopted in her later fiction: 'Demander au public de lire entre les lignes, c'est dangereux' (*Tout compte fait*, p.175), she says. The technique in *Les Belles Images* is contrasted with what she had done previously:

Dans mes précédents romans, le point de vue de chaque personnage était nettement explicité et le sens de l'ouvrage se dégageait de leur confrontation. Dans celui-ci, il s'agissait de faire parler le silence. Le problème était neuf pour moi.

(*Tout compte fait*, p. 172.)

Although the book was generally well received, a section of her public did not appreciate her intentions and, in particular, Simone de Beauvoir regretted that 'le personnage du père de Laurence a souvent donné lieu à un malentendu' (*Tout compte fait*, p.174). Even so, she went on to use the same strategy in *La Femme rompue*. 'La Femme rompue' and 'Monologue' are also constructed 'à travers des silences' (*Tout compte fait*, p. 177).⁴³ It is with regard to 'La Femme rompue' that Simone de Beauvoir is most prescriptive. Her sympathies clearly lie with Maurice and Simone de Beauvoir sets out to expose Monique's *mauvaise foi*:

J'aurais voulu que le lecteur lût ce récit comme un roman policier; j'ai semé de-ci de-là des indices qui permettent de trouver la clé du mystère; mais à condition qu'on dépiste Monique comme on dépiste *un coupable*. [Emphasis added.]

(*Tout compte fait*, pp.175-76.)

Sadly, Simone de Beauvoir writes, 'le livre fut encore plus mal compris que le précédent [*Les Belles Images*] et cette fois la plupart des critiques m'éreintèrent' (*Tout compte fait*, p.177). She regrets that her women readers 'partageaient l'aveuglement de Monique'

⁴³ I am reminded of Kristeva's comments about women's writing and one of the ways women tend to deal with the art of composition: '— silence, and the unspoken, riddled with repetition, weave an evanescent canvas'. Kristeva, Julia, 'Talking about *Polylogue*' in *French Feminist Thought*, ed. by Toril Moi, Oxford: Blackwell, 1987, pp. 110-17 (p. 113).

and believed that 'leurs réactions reposaient sur un énorme contresens' (*Tout compte fait*, p.178). Simone de Beauvoir is severe: 'La plupart des critiques ont prouvé par leurs comptes rendus qu'ils l'avaient très mal lu' (*Tout compte fait*, p.178).⁴⁴

In summary, there is an evident tension in Simone de Beauvoir's fiction between control and ambiguity. This desire to control the reading of her texts exists alongside Simone de Beauvoir's desire to enhance ambiguity in her texts. The freedom she professedly accords readers to participate in the creation of meaning coexists with the severe criticism she directs at readers whose interpretation differs from her own. These contradictions are revealing.

Why is Simone de Beauvoir so defensive? As Toril Moi says, 'the very intensity of Beauvoir's efforts to enforce the true meaning of her texts may make the sceptical reader wonder why she protests so much'.⁴⁵ Toril Moi wonders if 'there is something in these texts that threatens to escape even Simone de Beauvoir?'.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Critics have analysed why Simone de Beauvoir fails to achieve what she wished to do in 'La Femme rompue'. In 'Resisting Romance: Simone de Beauvoir, "The Woman Destroyed" and the Romance Script', (in *Contemporary French Fiction by Women: Feminist Perspectives*, ed. by Attack, Margaret and Phil Powrie, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), Elizabeth Fallaize looks at the ideology of romance in connection with Simone de Beauvoir's fiction. She shows how impossible a task Simone de Beauvoir set herself when she set out to undermine/ demystify the romance script in 'La Femme rompue'. No wonder Simone de Beauvoir's readers 'misunderstood' her story — it met almost all their expectations, notwithstanding the unhappy ending from Monique's point of view. Elizabeth Fallaize shows how structures and readership work against Simone de Beauvoir's subversive enterprise; it was published in serial form in *Elle* magazine and focused on the complications of love for an individual woman. Although Monique's strategies are implicated in her failure to win her man, the battle itself is not challenged; Maurice, vindicated by the narrative, is clearly identified as the prize. Readers are inclined to identify with Monique, not only because of the personal, intimate tone of the first person narrative, but also because of the lifestyle they generally shared with her.

In her analysis of the rhetorical strategies used in 'La Femme rompue', Toril Moi has shown how they provoke the misreadings identified by Simone de Beauvoir and confirmed by her own experience of teaching the text ('Intentions and Effects', pp. 61-93). She makes a useful distinction between the author's declared intentions which may not have any discernible textual effects and the intentionality of the text itself, that is, the logic of the text as produced by the reader, whether the writer knows it or not.

⁴⁵ Moi, 'Intentions and Effects', p. 67.

⁴⁶ Moi, 'Intentions and Effects', p. 67.

Speaking of her intentions in her later fiction, Simone de Beauvoir uses phrases such as ‘donner à voir’ and ‘faire transparaître’.⁴⁷ This is not a new way of looking at literature for Simone de Beauvoir; ambiguity and readers’ participation in the creation of meaning were always crucial to her enterprise. She speaks of her earlier fiction in analogous terms.⁴⁸ What is new is the textual strategies used to put these intentions into effect and the changed emphasis this approach gives rise to. Noteworthy in this connection is the explicit absence of Simone de Beauvoir from her later texts. Of course, the implied author is never completely absent (after all, it is she who in ‘La Femme rompue’ plants ‘des indices qui permettent de trouver la clé du mystère’⁴⁹), but there is a definite shift from using multiple narrative viewpoints where the narrators’ points of view coincide with Simone de Beauvoir’s to some extent at least, to the use of narrators that are placed at a distance from her. Speaking of *Les Belles Images* she writes: ‘Personne, dans cet univers auquel je suis hostile, ne pouvait parler en mon nom; cependant pour le donner à voir il me fallait prendre à son égard un certain recul’ (*Tout compte fait*, p. 172). This can be contrasted with what Simone de Beauvoir says about *L’Invitée*: ‘A chaque chapitre, je coïncidais avec un de mes héros [...] J’adoptai d’ordinaire le point de vue de Françoise à qui je prêtais, à travers d’importantes transpositions, ma propre expérience’ (*La Force de l’âge*, pp. 346-7). She tells us: ‘Dans ce roman, je me livrais, je me risquais [...]’ (*La Force de l’âge*, p. 349) and ‘je m’y étais risquée tout entière’ (*La Force de l’âge*, p. 570). Simone de Beauvoir’s fate is bound up with her character’s in this text:

Surtout, en déliant Françoise, par un crime, de la dépendance où la tenait son amour pour Pierre, je retrouvai ma propre autonomie. [...] il me fallait aller au bout de mon fantasme, lui donner corps sans en rien atténuer, si je voulais

⁴⁷ See *Tout compte fait*, p. 172. These expressions are used with reference to *Les Belles Images*.

⁴⁸ See ‘Littérature et métaphysique’, *Existentialisme et la sagesse des nations*, pp. 106 and 109; ‘Mon expérience’, *Les Écrits*, p. 447.

⁴⁹ *Tout compte fait*, p.176.

conquérir pour mon compte la solitude où je précipitai Françoise. En effet, l'identification s'opéra.

(*La Force de l'âge*, pp. 348-9.)

In *Les Mandarins*, Simone de Beauvoir wished to put all of herself — 'je voulais y mettre tout de moi' (*La Force des choses*, p. 211) — and divides her experience between Anne and Henri.⁵⁰

It may seem paradoxical that the further Simone de Beauvoir ostensibly withdrew from her texts, the more prescriptive she became about what they truly meant. Heightened anxiety of control goes some way towards making sense of and explaining this. The more 'freedom' she gave readers, the less she trusted them. And the fact that they did misunderstand, of course, proved that she had been right. Simone de Beauvoir who was disappointed in her readers, was very conscious of the fact that she had disappointed them. It is a recurring theme in her memoirs. She repeats her attempts to find understanding and approval, in her search for a positive closure, only to recreate the familiar sense of having failed, of having been misunderstood, a disappointment. She repeatedly (re)created the gap between intention and outcome where this pattern could be relived. It is the feeling of disappointment that predominates despite the evident success of her fiction, especially of her later books.

Simone de Beauvoir gives readers freedom to read between the lines but their freedom is strictly limited. Authorial control is not renounced. Foucault tells us that truth is related to power. Simone de Beauvoir seeks to retain power over the reader by imposing a true reading of her texts.⁵¹ In Simone de Beauvoir's mind there is a correct

⁵⁰ See *La Force des choses*, pp. 287-8.

⁵¹ Furthermore, the fact that readers encounter a slippery and unstable text increases the likelihood that they will have recourse to authorial comments beyond the text for confirmation of the 'correct' reading. Martha Noel Evans develops this point in relation to the use of the *style indirect libre* in *L'Invitée*: 'By maintaining the reader in a confused and confusing relation to her discourse, flipping in and out between emotional fusion and moral judgement, Beauvoir as author finally displaces the text as object of desire. The text is so undependable and contradictory that in order to take up a well-defined relation to it we must seek help, guidance approval from *outside* the text, in the mind and will

reading that readers are free to choose. Directed to find this reading, to read meaning between the lines, in the space which is empty and where nothing exists, readers cannot but fail. Simone de Beauvoir's 'trust' in her readers is disappointed again and again. Inevitably, by failing to use their freedom correctly, they fall into the *mauvaise foi* trap that Simone de Beauvoir has set up. Her autobiography condemns her women readers as she invites her readers to condemn her characters.

Simone de Beauvoir, we have seen, valued ambiguity in the name of realism, *vraisemblance*. Although she intended the ambiguity she sought to be controlled and contained between the lines, she also found it in language itself, in the madness inherent in the text, that is to say, in those qualities that destabilise meaning and identity, that represent chaos. I see the 'second writing' in the memoirs as a bid to restore control, to contain the madness in the text, as a defence against chaos. In this, my understanding accords with the views expressed by Martha Noel Evans. During the course of her discussion on gender and the 'hidden complex of vulnerabilities and defenses' that Simone de Beauvoir's ambivalence gives rise to, she makes the following comment:

While [Simone de Beauvoir's] ample commentary on her fiction betrays some uneasiness, some attempt to domesticate her fiction's wildness, the net effect of these commentaries is to cover the confusion, to shield or prevent the reader from facing the trouble that is there.

(*Masks of Tradition*, p. 80.)

Simone de Beauvoir's anxiety at the excess and ambiguity inscribed in her fiction seems to me to be a key factor underlying her efforts to prescribe how her texts should be read, her attempt to retrench in her memoirs. Her exegesis can be seen to mask other possible readings.⁵² The 'second writing' in the memoirs also reveals Simone de Beauvoir's

of its creator'. *Masks of tradition: Women and the Politics of Writing in Twentieth-Century France*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987, p. 90.

⁵² I also relate this to the way that Simone de Beauvoir seems to have happily seized upon the debate about the 'bad' ending in *L'Invitée* and to have acquiesced in the criticism in order to elude the more threatening questions that a defence of its excess would have raised. Thus, the madness of the text was

compulsion to complete. Fictional texts that replicate the openness and inconclusiveness of existence are defined (explained and circumscribed) in the memoirs.

My readings of Simone de Beauvoir will focus on how the madness inherent in the text of her works, functions to unsettle meaning. My centre of interest is not the theme of madness in the fiction. What interests me is the way that textual strategies duplicate madness in the text, the way that the text structures an experience of madness which is not locatable in any one character but which is an effect of the text as a whole. I read madness metaphorically as an intrinsic quality of the texts. This is not to say that the texts per se are 'mad'.⁵³

I must also underline, given the historical connection between women and madness in our patriarchal culture, that I do not wish to suggest that Simone de Beauvoir was 'mad' or to seek to devalue her work by doing so. I do not believe that my locating signs of madness in the text need be interpreted in this way. It is widely recognised that throughout history, women who have resisted patriarchal authority have been defined as mad and silenced.⁵⁴ This is pointed out by Alice Jardine who argues that women writers are less willing to experiment in a radical way with existing literary conventions and relates women's 'respect for form' precisely to women's having been 'closer to all possible transgressions'. As she puts it, 'one fatal step outside of symbolic pre-

defined, curtailed and dismissed. See Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, pp. 95-6 for a discussion of Simone de Beauvoir's attitude to the ending of *L'Invitée*.

⁵³ I do not intend to psychoanalyse the texts or Simone de Beauvoir or, for that matter, her characters.

⁵⁴ See Chesler, Phyllis, *Women and Madness*, New York: Avon, 1972. She describes the relationship between the female condition and madness, showing how both women who fully act out the conditioned female role and those who reject or are ambivalent about the female role are defined as mad (p. 56). 'The ethic of mental health is masculine in our culture', she argues (p. 69). See also Showalter, Elaine, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980*, London: Virago, 1987 and Evans, Martha Noel, *Fits and Starts: A Genealogy of Hysteria in Modern France*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991. During a discussion about the antipsychiatry movement in an interview with Alice Jardine, Simone de Beauvoir said: 'Given masculine norms, it is clear that women are more likely to be considered crazy — I'm not saying to be crazy. [...] It's terrible this tendency to consider women something dangerous to society... but, truthfully speaking they are dangerous, even those who aren't feminists, because there has always been a women's revolt'. Jardine, Alice, 'Interview with Simone de Beauvoir', *Signs*, Winter, 1979, 224-36, p. 229.

scriptions and [they are] designated as mad'.⁵⁵ In a sense, in reading transgression and resistance in Simone de Beauvoir's fiction as signs of madness, I am reappropriating madness as a positive force within the text.⁵⁶

One of the most influential studies on madness to date has been undertaken by Foucault in his *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*.⁵⁷ Much of what he argues here can be related to Simone de Beauvoir's textual practice.

What interests Foucault is the way individuals and the social body are regulated through the articulation of discourses, through the application of knowledge/ power. For Foucault, discourses are 'historically variable ways of specifying knowledge and truth'.⁵⁸ Discourses produce 'reality'. Discursive practices produce the categories in which we think ourselves and our society. Truth claims of knowledges are not verifiable outside the discourses in which they are produced. Foucault rejects conventional histories of psychiatry that interpret the emergence of psychiatric medicine as a series of humanitarian advances. For Foucault, the modern conception of mental illness and the asylum have been unknowingly constructed out of elements of the classical (seventeenth-century) experience of madness.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Jardine, Alice, 'Pre-texts for the Transatlantic Feminist', *Yale French Studies*, 62, 1981, 220-36 (pp. 232-33).

⁵⁶ In so doing, I do not wish to glamorise madness itself. As Elaine Showalter says, interpreting madness as a form of feminist protest comes 'dangerously close to romanticizing and endorsing madness as a desirable form of rebellion rather than seeing it as the desperate communication of the powerless' (*The Female Malady*, p. 5). Moreover, whilst my study does not specifically interrogate gender as a factor of the production of Simone de Beauvoir's texts, this nevertheless forms the context of the discussion. Nor is it the aim of this study to consider the gender politics that inflect the content and reception of Simone de Beauvoir's fiction. This is not to deny the importance of these areas of investigation. However, an examination of the gendered ideologies that permeate the production and reception of the texts is a project beyond the scope of this study.

⁵⁷ Foucault, Michel, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, Paris: Gallimard, 1972 (first published in 1961). Further references to this study will be included in the text.

⁵⁸ This definition of Foucault's notion of discourses is given by Caroline Ramazanoğlu in the Introduction to *Up Against Foucault: Exploration of Some Tensions between Foucault and Feminism*, London: Routledge, 1993, p. 19.

⁵⁹ For example, see p. 177.

Foucault's study begins with the disappearance of leprosy at the end of the Middle Ages. Madness was to take the place of leprosy, prompting the same 'jeux d'exclusion' (p. 16), the same 'réactions de partage, d'exclusion, de purification' (p. 18). However, medieval madness for Foucault was excluded 'within' society, not 'from' it as it would be in the seventeenth century. Far from being expelled during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, madness played an essential role in the symbolic landscape of the Renaissance. Foucault discusses the ritual exclusion of mad strangers and the nomadic existence of the mad who were to be found in large numbers in centres of pilgrimage or trade. Frequently consigned to ships, 'des nefes des fous', the mad occupied a liminal space (p. 22). Foucault gives the following explanation of the origins of 'la Nef des fous':

C'est qu'elle symbolise toute une inquiétude, montée soudain à l'horizon de la culture européenne, vers la fin du Moyen Age. La folie et le fou deviennent personnages majeurs, dans leur ambiguïté: menace et dérision, vertigineuse déraison du monde, et mince ridicule des hommes.

(*Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, p. 24.)

Madness replaces death as the major preoccupation towards the end of the fifteenth century. 'La folie, c'est le déjà-là de la mort' (p. 26). It cheats death of its victory. Madness, perceptible in sin and foibles, is the nothingness of death in life.

Foucault considers the divergent experiences of madness in art and literature of the time. He compares the tragic, cosmic conception of madness in paintings with the moral critique in writings of the time that see madness in human sin and foibles. Progressively, '*la tragique folie du monde*' became obscured as a '*conscience critique de l'homme*' was given precedence and madness became an experience in language ('dans le champ du langage') 'où l'homme était confronté à sa vérité morale' (p. 39). Ensuing classical conceptions of madness and the modern conceptions of madness that have developed from them, neglect the tragic and are necessarily partial. By the end of

the sixteenth century the dominant experience of madness is that it is no longer at the margins, the threat on the horizon. It has been brought into the domain of reason, contained and tamed. Madness and reason were mutually dependent, each guaranteeing the existence of the other. Madness came to be embraced as an essential part of reason, a form of reason itself 'soit une de ses forces secrètes, soit un des moments de sa manifestation, soit une forme paradoxale dans laquelle elle peut prendre conscience d'elle même' (p. 44).

It is in the seventeenth century that the voices of madness are reduced to silence (p. 56). Foucault traces the history of the exile of madness from reason and truth in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The mad were only one of the banished groups to endure the moral condemnation of their age. Unreason ('la déraison') is the defining characteristic of the heterogeneous categories interned during 'The Great Confinement', ('Le Grand Renfermement').⁶⁰ Whereas during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, madness had been a vague, all pervasive threat, in the Classical Age it becomes a tangible threat that is localised and segregated:

A partir du XVII^e siècle, la déraison n'est plus la grande hantise du monde [...]. Elle prend l'allure d'un fait humain [...]. Ce qui était jadis inévitable péril des choses et du langage de l'homme, de sa raison et de sa terre [...], commence à se mesurer selon un certain écart par rapport à la norme sociale.

(Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique, p. 117.)

Internment, literally and symbolically, places unreason at a distance. However, as unreason involves free will, choice and intention, all of which are attributes of reason, the division reason/ unreason remains uncertain ('mal assuré' p. 156). As the mad were held to make the same free choice as other interneers, (the poor, libertines, profaners, debauchees, spendthrifts et al.), it was fit that they be subject to the same regime of

⁶⁰ Throughout this period there was a concurrent, separate experience of madness as illness. A limited number of the insane were treated in hospitals. See pp. 131-39.

punishment and correction. And yet, the mad ('les insensés, les esprits aliénés, ou dérangés, les extravagants, les gens en démente' p. 159) did have a special status.

Internment that hid the scandalous face of unreason in general, actually made the mad into a spectacle, a spectacle watched from a distance, behind bars, unrelated to reason.

Madness was animality: 'La folie est devenue chose à regarder: non plus monstre au fond de soi-même, mais animal aux mécanismes étranges, bestialité où l'homme depuis longtemps, est aboli' (p. 163). Why, Foucault asks, is unreason reduced to silence whilst 'on laisse la folie parler librement le langage de son scandale'? The answer lies in the moral lesson that madness had to give:

'Ce qui est folie c'est cette incarnation de l'homme dans la bête, qui est, en tant que point dernier de la chute, le signe le plus manifeste de sa culpabilité; et, en tant qu'objet ultime de complaisance divine, le symbole de l'universel pardon et de l'innocence retrouvée.

(*Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, p. 173.)

In the seventeenth century the ultimate threat of unreason, revealed in the animality of madness, lies in absolute freedom.

When Foucault turns his attention from 'The Great Confinement', that is 'une pratique qui maîtrise la contre-nature et la réduit au silence' (p. 189), to discursive practices surrounding madness which constitute 'une connaissance qui tente de déchiffrer des vérités de nature' (p. 189), he finds no dialogue between these two experiences of madness. 'Entièrement exclue d'un côté, entièrement objectivée de l'autre, la folie n'est jamais *manifestée* pour elle-même, et dans un langage qui lui serait propre.' (p. 189). This division explains the profound silence of madness during the classical age. It had the effect of making 'le fou et la folie [...] étrangers l'un à l'autre' (p. 223). The mad were recognisable whereas madness was nothingness and so undefinable. Madness was unreason, the negative emptiness of reason, nothing (p. 268). The ultimate paradox of madness is that it must express this nothingness 'en signes, en

paroles, en gestes [...] en prenant apparence dans l'ordre de la raison; en devenant ainsi le contraire d'elle-même'(p. 261).

A recurring idea in Foucault's study is that madness cannot be silenced, that it will find a voice. Although a critical awareness of madness has dominated since the Renaissance, the tragic consciousness of madness has never quite disappeared and Foucault finds evidence of this in the work of Nietzsche, Van Gogh, Freud, Artaud (p. 40). The tragic experience of madness cannot be contained; it is dangerously masked by rational analysis of madness as mental illness, but 'au point dernier de la contrainte, l'éclatement était nécessaire, auquel nous assistons depuis Nietzsche' (p. 40). Foucault argues that since the tragic experience of madness 'disappeared' with the Renaissance, interpretations of madness have combined, to differing degrees, four synchronous perceptions of madness: 'à chaque instant, se fait et se défait l'équilibre de ce qui dans l'expérience de la folie relève d'une conscience dialectique, d'un partage rituel, d'une reconnaissance lyrique et enfin du savoir' (p. 187). None of these elements ever disappears completely, though, at any one time, one or other of them may predominate, leaving the others in virtual obscurity, giving rise to tensions and conflict 'au-dessous du niveau du langage' (p. 187). The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have favoured an analytical approach to madness, an approach that seeks an objective knowledge of madness. However, Foucault argues, all the other ways of apprehending madness continue to exist in the heart of our culture.

Qu'elles ne puissent plus guère recevoir de formulation que lyrique, ne prouve pas qu'elles dépérissent, ni qu'elles prolongent malgré tout une existence que le savoir a depuis longtemps récusée, mais que maintenues dans l'ombre, elles se vivifient dans les formes les plus libres et les plus originales du langage. Et leur pouvoir de contestation n'en est sans doute que plus vigoureux.

(Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique, p. 188.)

Foucault's notion of madness clearly converges at times with Simone de Beauvoir's writing practice. In spite of attempts to silence, confine and ignore madness, madness finds a voice in her writing. In spite of repression, it forces its way into the text. Simone de Beauvoir's text gets away. It gets messy. The voice of the madness in Simone de Beauvoir's text is, in many ways, the voice that madness had in Western culture before 'The Great Confinement', before it was silenced. Characteristics of the tragic and critical experiences of madness as depicted by Foucault, coincide with the experience of madness at a discursive level in the text of Simone de Beauvoir's fiction. Reading madness in the text is reading these qualities.

The tragic experience of madness informs Simone de Beauvoir's fiction. The first quality of madness I shall read for in her writing is excess. Madness was excess. Foucault tells us that, with the Renaissance, art becomes dominated by the imagination, liberated as Gothic forms disintegrate, no longer tied to strict, straightforward representations of scripture and spiritual significations, and 'l'image commence à graviter autour de sa propre folie' (p. 29). In Simone de Beauvoir, as in the tragic experience of madness, we find a multiplication of significances/ meanings. And in her writing too, 'le rêve, l'insensée, le déraisonnable peuvent se glisser dans cet excès de sens' (p. 29).

I shall also read Simone de Beauvoir's fiction for ambiguity. Madness was ambiguity: 'Tant de significations diverses s'insèrent sous la surface de l'image, qu'elle ne présente plus qu'une face énigmatique' (p. 30). Madness exerted a powerful fascination and was represented as a temptation: 'La liberté, même effrayante, de ses rêves, les fantasmes de sa folie, ont pour l'homme du XV^e siècle, plus de pouvoirs d'attraction que la réalité désirable de la chair' (p. 31). If the fantastic and wild disorder of animality revealed the anger and madness at the heart of human beings, madness was

also knowledge. In their foolish innocence, the mad had access to secret, forbidden knowledge. Madness is discernible in images that are the fruit of unrestrained imagination. I shall read Simone de Beauvoir's fiction for traces of the attraction of excess and disorder that, beyond the expression of anger and madness, convey a sense of elusive meaning. Madness in the text is excess, multivalence and ambiguity.

The characteristics of the critical consciousness of madness (p. 39), the second strand of the experience of madness in the Renaissance, and which came to dominate classical conceptions and thereafter modern conceptions of madness, also find echoes in Simone de Beauvoir's writing. In the critical consciousness of madness, madness and reason are seen as inextricably related: 'Chacune est la mesure de l'autre, et dans ce mouvement de référence réciproque, elles se récuse toutes deux, mais se fondent l'une par l'autre' (p. 41). The human condition is madness when measured by the infinite wisdom ('raison démesurée') of God. Human madness is experienced as contradiction as everything is the opposite of what it appears and truth is never attained: 'tout l'ordre humain n'est que folie' (p. 42). In its inexpressibility the wisdom of God is also madness, 'un abîme de déraison' (p. 43), where reason is silenced. So reason and madness cancel each other out at the same time as they construct and affirm each other in a perpetual dialectic. In the text, madness informs the rational and throws light on it. The rational is undermined. Signs of madness will be read where opposites are asserted as equivalents in a text where contradiction and paradox are familiar. Likewise, I shall read madness in Simone de Beauvoir's fiction at points where truth becomes elusive and when language is brought up against inexpressibility.

The madness which manifests itself in Simone de Beauvoir's texts is also inflected by classical conceptions of madness. By the end of the sixteenth century madness is no longer at the margins, the threat on the horizon, 'cette fuyante et absolue

limite' (p. 53). Madness now plays on the ambiguous boundary between the real and the illusory, truth and appearance, it is the embodiment of contradiction: 'Elle cache et manifeste, elle dit le vrai et le mensonge, elle est ombre et lumière' (p. 54). In the hospital of the mad that replaces the ship in the collective imagination at the end of the seventeenth century, the mad speak 'la contradiction et l'ironie, le langage dédoublé de la Sagesse' (p. 53). Madness is 'le signe ironique qui brouille les repères du vrai et du chimérique' (p. 55). Simone de Beauvoir's textual strategies that blur boundaries in an analogous way will be deemed to introduce madness in the text. Irony and contradiction can be read as madness in the text.

For Foucault, one word conveys what the experience of madness was in the asylums of the classical age: 'furieux'. It designated 'une sorte de région indifférenciée du désordre' (p. 125). Madness disturbs/ disrupts. Who (what) is mad is recognised, determined by reference to reason and the sense of logic and coherence and continuity of their discourse. Madness is instantly recognisable in its negativity: 'Elle est de l'ordre de la rupture. Elle surgit tout d'un coup comme discordance' (p. 198). Reading for madness in Simone de Beauvoir's text means reading for disruption, incoherence, discordance and fragmentation.

In this nexus, the meaningfulness of language is cast into doubt. Indeed, Foucault argues that madness 'ne se présente dans ses signes les plus manifestes que comme erreur, fantasme, illusion, *langage vain et privé de contenu*' (p. 191). (Emphasis added.) On a textual level, madness is apparent wherever the capacity of language to be fully meaningful is undermined.

To summarise, I shall read the characteristics of madness outlined by Foucault as madness in the text. The tragic experience of madness in the Renaissance figures on a discursive level as excess, disorder, multiplicity, ambiguity and fascination and

elusoriness. The critical experience of madness of that era is enacted in the text as contradiction and paradox and in inexpressability and the unattainability of truth. Finally, the classical experience of madness is duplicated in the text when boundaries are obscured and in irony, disruption, incoherence, discordance and fragmentation. Madness is discernible at a discursive level whenever the text puts meaningfulness of language into question.

My reading of madness in the text is also indebted to Julia Kristeva's theoretical writing on language. The object of attention in my study of Simone de Beauvoir's writing practice is language itself, what Kristeva calls poetic language, the language of materiality as opposed to transparency where meaning is assumed to lie behind/ beyond language. Kristeva has identified two types of signifying processes at work within the production of meaning: the 'semiotic' and the 'symbolic'. The semiotic process relates to the *chora* which is pre-symbolic. As Toril Moi puts it, 'the semiotic is linked to the pre-Oedipal primary processes, the basic pulsions of which Kristeva sees as predominantly anal and oral, and as simultaneously dichotomous (life v. death, expulsion v. introjection) and heterogeneous. The endless flow of pulsions is gathered up in the *chora* [...]'.⁶¹ The symbolic process relates to the imposition of symbolic law, what Leon S. Roudiez refers to as 'the establishment of sign and syntax, paternal function, grammatical and social constraints'.⁶² Poetic language is the outcome of a specific connection between the semiotic and the symbolic. Toril Moi explains that once the subject has entered into the symbolic order, the *chora* is repressed to a greater or lesser extent and is only identifiable 'as pulsional *pressure* on symbolic language: as contradictions, meaninglessness, disruption, silences and absences in the symbolic

⁶¹ Moi, Toril, *Sexual Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, London: Methuen, 1985, p. 161.

⁶² Roudiez, Leon S., 'Introduction' in Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. by Leon S. Roudiez, New York: Columbia University Press, 1980, p. 7.

language'.⁶³ Traditionally, fiction has been dominated by the symbolic. Recently, it has been more affected by the semiotic.⁶⁴ For Kristeva, poetic language is revolutionary. She believes that writing disrupted by the the semiotic, the 'spasmodic force' of the unconscious, undermines conventional meaning which is the structure that upholds the patriarchal symbolic order, that is to say, all human social and cultural institutions. This disruption is related to madness. Toril Moi explains that 'if unconscious pulsations of the *chora* were to take over the subject entirely, the subject would fall back into pre-Oedipal or imaginary chaos and develop some form of mental illness. The subject whose language lets such forces disrupt the symbolic order, in other words, is also the subject who runs the greater risk of lapsing into madness'.⁶⁵ I read marks of disruption metaphorically as signs of madness in the text.

My study of the madness that finds concrete expression in Simone de Beauvoir's writing practice, dovetails with Shoshana Felman's work on literature and madness. Her exploration of madness in Stendhal's novels is based on close textual analysis which allows her to advance a classification of the instances of madness and of the experiences of madness found in them.⁶⁶ She goes on to trace the evolution of Stendhal's treatment of madness over time. In the concluding chapter to this study, 'Écriture et folie', Shoshana Felman raises an important question about madness and language: 'Comment la folie pourrait-elle accéder au langage, puisqu'elle est, par essence, ce qui se tait, ce qui bouleverse le registre du sens et qui, par là même s'exclut du domaine de l'intelligible?' (p. 242). Madness is opposed to reasonableness and reason: 'La folie désire l'hyperbole; la raison impose la litote, pose les bornes même du discours — et du

⁶³ Moi, *Sexual Textual Politics*, p. 162.

⁶⁴ Roudiez, p. 7.

⁶⁵ Moi, *Sexual Textual Politics*, p. 11.

⁶⁶ Felman, Shoshana, *La «Folie» dans l'oeuvre romanesque de Stendhal*, Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1971. (It is interesting to note that Stendhal was one of Simone de Beauvoir's favourite writers. See 'Stendhal ou le romanesque du vrai', *Le Deuxième sexe*, Vol I, pp. 375-89.)

sens: conditions de la rencontre de l'Autre. L'hyperbole est violence, folie du désir; la litote — barrage, discipline du langage' (p. 242-43). Felman identifies a permanent tension in Stendhal between reason and madness. I want to investigate the extent to which this tension obtains in Simone de Beauvoir's fiction, the way in which the excess of madness upsets lucid, measured prose.

The question raised in the conclusion to Felman's study of Stendhal, is one of the starting points of her book, *La Folie et la chose littéraire*.⁶⁷ In the introductory chapter entitled 'Écriture et folie: pourquoi ce livre', she states her aim to explore the connection between literature and madness. Her study seeks to determine not only how texts speak of madness but also how madness is repressed in texts (pp. 15-16). Her analyses cut across my own readings of Simone de Beauvoir. Shoshana Felman examines the rhetorical strategies of different writers in relation to madness.⁶⁸ She distinguishes between 'la rhétorique de la folie', (that is discourse about madness which, she argues, is always 'une rhétorique de la dénégarion'), and 'la folie de la rhétorique':

Mais si le discours sur la folie n'est pas un discours *de* la folie, n'est pas, proprement, un discours fou, il n'est pas moins, dans ces textes, une *folie qui parle*, une folie qui se joue toute seule à travers le langage mais sans que personne ne puisse devenir le sujet parlant de ce qui se joue. C'est ce mouvement de jeu qui déjoue le sens et par lequel l'énoncé s'aliène à la *performance* textuelle, que je dénomme, dans ce livre, «folie de la rhétorique».

(*La Folie et la chose littéraire*, pp. 347-48.)

She argues that discourse about madness is subverted by 'la folie de la rhétorique', the madness in the text. My exploration of Simone de Beauvoir's writing practice centres on 'la folie de la rhétorique' and this process of subversion.

⁶⁷ Felman, Shoshana, *La Folie et la Chose Littéraire*, Paris: Seuil, 1978.

⁶⁸ The writers whose work she explores are Gérard de Nerval, Arthur Rimbaud, Honoré de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert and Henry James. The rhetorical strategies she considers include the destabilising of identity and repetition, irony and parody.

Another influential study on madness and literature is *The Madwoman in the Attic* by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar.⁶⁹ It deals with the character of the madwoman in nineteenth century fiction by women. Mad women characters are read as an expression of women authors' rage against patriarchy and their anxiety of authorship.⁷⁰ The argument is that nineteenth century women authors tell the truth but 'tell it slant', concealing deeper, less acceptable levels of meaning, thus 'simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards'.⁷¹ This impressive study is ultimately flawed as author and character are conflated, the madwoman taken to be 'the *author's* double, an image of her own anxiety and rage'.⁷² Yet, in spite of this and in spite of Gilbert and Gubar's focusing on identifying hidden plots in the works they study, *The Madwoman in the Attic* pinpoints textual strategies and particular images related to the expression of women's revolt against patriarchy in nineteenth century fiction that can also be traced in Simone de Beauvoir's fiction. I shall read textual strategies such as the use of parody and irony and the subversion of the conventions of language, as the stamp of madness on a textual level. Images of enclosure, illness, fragmentation and mirrors that recur in nineteenth century fiction by women will be read in Simone de Beauvoir as an inscription of madness in the text.

My readings of Simone de Beauvoir are based on close textual analysis to show how madness is enacted in the text. Autobiographical and philosophical matters, whilst they form the context of my analyses, will not, in the main, be directly addressed here.

⁶⁹ Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.

⁷⁰ Gilbert and Gubar's ideas on women's creativity and the use of images of enclosure are related to 'La Femme rompue' by Phil Powrie in 'Rereading Between The Lines: A Postscript on *La Femme rompue*', *Modern Language Review*, 87, 1992, 320-29.

⁷¹ Gilbert and Gubar, p. 73.

⁷² Gilbert and Gubar, p. 78. For a detailed evaluation of *The Madwoman in the Attic* see Moi, *Sexual Textual Politics*, pp. 57-69. *The Madwoman in the Attic* is discussed in relation to Simone de Beauvoir in Fallaize, *The Novels*, p. 179.

My study interrogates the text itself and seeks to be as little distracted from that examination as possible.

To achieve a balance between detail and breadth, the corpus that forms the basis of the study is restricted to just three books, *L'Invitée*, *Les Belles Images* and *La Femme rompue*. This group of texts allows for useful comparisons to be made between the early and late fiction, including as it does Simone de Beauvoir's first published novel, *L'Invitée*, published in 1943, and the last fiction she wrote, *Les Belles Images* published in 1966 and *La Femme rompue* published in 1968. The corpus is varied as it contains a long novel, a shorter novel and three short stories. These works have been selected as they best exemplify the way madness inflects the text, yet this is not to imply that these are the only works that do so. In fact, all of Simone de Beauvoir's fiction might be read for madness in the text in the same way. Similarly, within this study even, in order to allow for depth of analysis, Chapter One is based on a close reading of a single text, *L'Invitée*, and Chapter Four is based on a close reading of *Les Belles Images* only. In each case, the text has been selected because it best illustrates the qualities under discussion, not because it is the unique exemplar.

In Chapter One, I undertake a close reading of *L'Invitée*, examining the extent to which Simone de Beauvoir had recourse to Gothic conventions and figures and challenging realist assumptions that surround her first published text. Networks of images, words and motifs that recur in the novel and contribute to the pervasive Gothic atmosphere are traced. I shall argue that insofar as the text is Gothic and transgressive, it is also mad.

Chapter Two will deal with the imagery of madness in all the texts under discussion. I shall examine how the madness experienced by women protagonists is mediated in the texts by images that evoke their pain and distress. Connections between

the imagery in *L'Invitée* and in *Les Belles Images* and the three stories in *La Femme rompue* will be explored.

Disruptive textual strategies that introduce instability and incoherence into the text are the focus in Chapter Three. An examination of character function will reveal how the text reproduces the disintegration of identity that is experienced by characters on the brink of madness and how the notion of a unified and stable identity is undermined. I shall investigate the way that disruption and fragmentation unsettle meaning and contribute to the creation of a mad textual universe. This chapter will be based on readings of *L'Invitée*, *Les Belles Images*, 'Monologue', and 'La Femme rompue'.

Finally, Chapter Four concentrates on the problematical nature of language and meaning in *Les Belles Images*. I shall argue that madness is exemplified at those points in the text where language refuses to signify and where meaning is unsettled. An examination of the textual strategies that bring readers to share Laurence's loss of confidence in language and its meaningfulness forms the basis of the chapter. The use of plurality, irony, enumeration and repetition will be addressed.

My starting point is Simone de Beauvoir's first published novel and the symbolic universe she creates there.

Chapter One

L'Invitée: The Gothic Imagination

L'Invitée is a highly figurative text. In this chapter I want to examine the symbolic universe that Simone de Beauvoir created in her first published novel. The term symbolic universe refers to more than the sum of the images in the text, it is also the network of repeated key images, words and motifs that accumulate in the text, contributing to the atmosphere of the text. The writing in *L'Invitée* acquires much of its power from reiteration. The challenge to those writing about this writing is to do justice to the dense web of repeated utterances whilst avoiding the danger of repetitiveness. Extensive quotation is unavoidable. The richness of Simone de Beauvoir's language and its resonances means that quotations used to illustrate one particular point may well illustrate points that have been made earlier, as well as points yet to be made. Sometimes connections will be made explicit whereas, at other times, certain elements of quotations will be left, as it were, to speak for themselves.

The symbolic universe of *L'Invitée* is Gothic. This may be a surprising assertion considering that this text has been read, for the most part, as a realist, philosophical, autobiographical novel. Indeed, this reading has authorial authority. In *La Force de l'âge*, Simone de Beauvoir discusses her first novel at length, describing how the real life trio, Jean-Paul Sartre, Olga Kosakiewicz (to whom the novel is dedicated) and herself, was transposed into fiction.¹ Simone de Beauvoir placed herself at the heart of her novel in the character of Françoise (p. 347). She also writes about the form of *L'Invitée* and acknowledges a debt to certain American writers of that time, notably to

¹ *La Force de l'âge*, pp. 346-53.

Dashiell Hammett and to Hemingway, as well as to Dostoyevsky and Agatha Christie.²

She places emphasis on the realism she set out to achieve:

Dans les passages réussis du roman, on arrive à une ambiguïté de significations qui correspond à celle qu'on rencontre dans la réalité. Je voulais aussi que les faits ne s'enchaînent pas selon les rapports univoques de causalité, mais qu'ils soient à la fois, comme dans la vie même, compréhensibles et contingents.

(*La Force de l'âge*, p. 352.)

This is not to suggest that Simone de Beauvoir belonged to the nineteenth century realist tradition. In an interview with Jill M. Wharfe, Simone de Beauvoir said in this connection: 'Je ne dis pas que je suis un écrivain réaliste. Je suis un écrivain qui a essayé de rendre compte un peu de la réalité'.³ Her notion of reality was, of course, quite different to nineteenth century notions of reality. As Françoise Arnaud Hibbs expresses it, Simone de Beauvoir's was a 'subjective realism'.⁴ Lorna Sage describes her as a writer of 'realist novels that put reality in quotation marks'.⁵

Judith Okely's reading of *L'Invitée* is autobiographical and psychoanalytical.⁶ Elizabeth Fallaize highlights the autobiographical nature of the psychological crisis in *L'Invitée* and also directs our attention to the way Simone de Beauvoir seems to advocate a philosophical reading of the novel by placing a quotation from Hegel as its epigraph: 'Chaque conscience poursuit la mort de l'autre.'⁷ Emphasis in Renée Winegarten's reading of *L'Invitée* also falls on autobiographical and philosophical

² The influence that American writers had on Simone de Beauvoir is discussed in Celeux, Anne-Marie. *Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir: Une expérience commune, deux écritures*, Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1976. Toril Moi explores the contradictions inherent in Simone de Beauvoir's use of the thriller and detective story models in *Simone de Beauvoir*, p. 100.

³ Wharfe, Jill. M., 'Perfect Interlocutors: Intertextuality and Divergence in the Fiction of Simone de Beauvoir and Sartre' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Birmingham, 1988). Interview with Simone de Beauvoir: Paris, 6 July 1985, Appendix 1, p. 344. I gratefully acknowledge permission to quote from this interview.

⁴ Hibbs, p. 10.

⁵ Sage, Lorna, *Women in the House of Fiction: Post-War Women Novelists*, London: Macmillan, 1992, p. viii.

⁶ Okely, pp. 139-40.

⁷ Fallaize, *The Novels*, p. 26.

aspects of the work.⁸ Toril Moi's reading of *L'Invitée* as a modern melodrama is closer to my own.⁹ Indeed, melodrama and the Gothic share a number of characteristics, notably, excess. (See below.) Although the emphasis in her reading remains philosophical and psychoanalytical, Toril Moi examines the imagery associated with Xavière and the threat she represents and she identifies what she refers to as 'a kind of luridly gothic imagination'.¹⁰ It is this area that my reading will explore and develop. It is my contention that this realist, philosophical novel is embedded in a Gothic universe that Simone de Beauvoir created in order to confront pain and madness, to express that darker side of herself. A close reading of the text reveals the extent to which she had recourse to Gothic conventions and figures which makes it justifiable to speak of the Gothic economy of the text.¹¹

The object here is to explore the insights to be gained from looking again at *L'Invitée* through the lens that the Gothic provides.¹² This is not intended to be a reductive attempt to define a number of stock Gothic figures and trace them onto Simone de Beauvoir's text. In any case, as Fred Botting points out in the introduction to his book on the Gothic, it is impossible to define a fixed set of Gothic conventions; for

⁸ Winegarten, pp. 101-106.

⁹ Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, pp. 95-124.

¹⁰ Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, p. 97.

¹¹ Simone de Beauvoir's correspondence with Jean-Paul Sartre reveals that she was reading M. G. Lewis's *The Monk*, (1795), a quintessential Gothic novel, at the time she was writing *L'Invitée*. Letter Saturday, 16 December 1939. *Simone de Beauvoir: Lettres à Sartre, 1930-1939*, vol. I, Paris: Gallimard, 1990. p. 356. She notes in this letter that she is reading Antonin Artaud's version of *The Monk*. This is neither a translation nor an adaptation but 'une sorte de «copie» en français du texte anglais original'. Artaud, Antonin, "*Le Moine*" de Lewis raconté par Antonin Artaud, (first published in 1931), in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. VI, Paris: Gallimard, 1966, 'Avertissement', p. 13. Artaud cut the original and intensified 'la violence et l'atrocité du récit' (Notes, p. 417). Interesting echoes link *L'Invitée* and *The Monk/Le Moine*. For example, in the first chapter of *The Monk*, an ageless gypsy woman who sings and dances, tells the fortune of the heroine (*The Monk*, pp. 34-39, *Le Moine*, pp. 48-52). Throughout the novel, details call to mind *L'Invitée*. In terms of tone, the two texts are congruous. It is interesting to recall that Foucault considered that Artaud's writing exemplified the tragic consciousness of madness. See Foucault, *Histoire de la folie*, p. 40.

¹² Three main sources have been referred to: Botting, Fred, *Gothic*, London: Routledge, 1996. MacAndrew, Elizabeth, *The Gothic Tradition in Fiction*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1979. Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, Revised edition, New York: Arno Press, 1980.

him the Gothic is a hybrid form incorporating and transforming other literary forms and developing and changing its own conventions in relation to newer modes of writing.¹³

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick sets out her aim in the introduction to her book:

I want to make it easier for the reader of 'respectable' nineteenth-century [we might add 'and twentieth-century'] novels to write 'Gothic' in the margin next to certain especially interesting passages, and to make that notation with a sense of linking specific elements in the passage with specific elements in the constellation of Gothic conventions.

(*The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, p. 2.)

What then does the term Gothic mean? What elements might go to make up 'the constellation of Gothic conventions', albeit unfixed? The first Gothic novels were stories of cruel passions and supernatural terror that took place in a sinister, medieval setting.¹⁴ The term has since come to apply to any novel with an obsessive, gloomy, violent, doom laden and terrifying atmosphere. The threat of irrational and evil forces looms over everything. Magic and the supernatural figure prominently. We know that 'spectres, monsters, demons, corpses, skeletons, evil aristocrats, monks and nuns, fainting heroines and bandits populate Gothic landscapes as suggestive figures of imagined and realistic threats' and that they are joined by the mad in the nineteenth century.¹⁵ Gothic texts are preoccupied with madness, identity and the dissolution of the self. Split personalities and doubles abound. Mirrors are a stock Gothic device, generally signifying alienation. The bestial within the human is a characteristic Gothic theme and sexuality a central concern. In Gothic texts sexuality tends to be distorted and emphasis is commonly laid on incest and eroticism. Uncertainties about sexuality are regularly linked to wider threats of disintegration.¹⁶ Live burial and tombs are favourite themes. Images of enclosure and weight coexist with images of space and vertigo.

¹³ Botting, p. 14.

¹⁴ The first Gothic novel is considered to be Horace Walpoles's *The Castle of Oranto* (1764).

¹⁵ Botting p. 2.

¹⁶ Botting, p.5.

No account of the Gothic would be complete without reference to Freud's notion of the uncanny as it is discussed in his essay of that name.¹⁷ Indeed, the uncanny is inseparable from the Gothic, it is one of its essential ingredients. At the beginning of his essay, Freud tells us that 'the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar' (p. 220) and he draws attention to Schelling's definition: 'everything is "unheimlich" that might have remained secret and hidden but has come to light' (p. 225). Freud's study allows him to refine his own definition and to concur with Schelling's (p. 241). Freud determines that the uncanny is 'something repressed which recurs (p. 241). The phenomenon of the double is of crucial importance to Freud's conception of the uncanny; a 'doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self' and the temporal equivalents, repetition and recurrence, all give rise to a sense of the uncanny (p. 234).

In the Gothic mode, feeling and emotion exceed reason. Ambivalence and ambiguity prevail. The unspeakable is quintessential Gothic; sometimes the term is used simply to mean awesome, whilst sometimes, according to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, it implies 'a range of reflections on language', whilst at other times it may be enacted in text as characters contend with the despair of the uncommunicable.¹⁸ An 'over-abundance of imaginative frenzy, untamed by reason' and a style characterised by boundlessness and over-ornamentation have been interpreted as signs of transgression in the Gothic.¹⁹ It is precisely in the expression of the inexpressible and the excesses of the

¹⁷ 'The Uncanny', *The Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol XVII, pp. 218-52. Uncanny is the generally accepted translation of the German term 'unheimlich' that, in fact, has no exact English or, for that matter, French translation. For a discussion of the different meanings of the term see Section I pp. 222-26 of Freud's essay. Further references to his essay will be given in brackets in the text.

¹⁸ Sedgwick, p. 3.

¹⁹ Botting, pp. 5-6.

Gothic mode that I locate the madness in the text of *L'Invitée*. Insofar as it is Gothic and thus transgressive, the text of *L'Invitée* is mad, it enacts madness.²⁰

'Gothic signifies a writing of excess.'²¹ These are the first words in Fred Botting's book, signalling how central this notion is to the Gothic. Much of the writing in *L'Invitée* is, as we shall see, excessive, hyperbolic, extravagant; it is Gothic writing to the extent that it is more likely to evoke emotion and work on readers' feelings than it is to prompt an intellectual response or rational argument. It is useful to begin this exploration of the Gothic in *L'Invitée* with a number of key passages that, in particular, epitomise Gothic writing, a writing of excess. A close reading of these passages highlights a dense network of words and motifs that are found throughout the text and that go to make up what I have referred to as the Gothic economy of the text. These words and motifs will be analysed in detail subsequently.²² What is of interest here, is the quality of the writing that makes it justifiable to speak of its excess.

These highly coloured, extravagant passages occur at climactic points in the narrative. The first passage relates the incident in the night-club when Xavière deliberately and repeatedly burns herself with a cigarette during a dance performance:

Xavière ne regardait plus, elle avait baissé la tête, elle tenait dans sa main droite une cigarette à demi consumée et elle l'approchait lentement de sa main gauche. Françoise eut peine à réprimer un cri; Xavière appliquait le tison rouge contre sa peau et un sourire aigu retroussait ses lèvres.

(*L'Invitée*, p. 354.)

Françoise then watches in horror as Xavière burns herself again: 'Xavière soufflait délicatement sur les cendres qui recouvraient sa brûlure; quand elle eut dispersé ce petit matelas protecteur, elle colla de nouveau contre la plaie mise à nu le bout embrasé de sa

²⁰ Foucault discusses the links between unreason, internment and what he terms 'la littérature fantastique de folie et d'horreur' that appeared in the nineteenth century. See *Histoire de la folie*, 'La Grande Peur', pp. 375-82.

²¹ Botting, p. 1.

²² The first key passage can be found on pp. 354-55 of *L'Invitée*. The second key passage is on pp. 362-64. The third key passage is on pp. 499-501.

cigarette'. Françoise's crisis, which is a metaphysical one²³, is related not in cool, rational prose but rather in hyperbolic terms: 'Françoise eut un haut-le-corps; ce n'était pas seulement sa chair qui se révoltait; elle se sentait atteinte d'une façon plus profonde et plus irrémédiable, jusqu'au coeur de son être. Derrière ce rictus maniaque, un danger menaçait, plus définitif que tous ceux qu'elle avait jamais imaginés' (p. 354).

Ambiguity is fostered. The danger is at once the most absolute and indeterminate. The second key passage that exemplifies excess is, in many ways, a continuation of the previous one that had been interrupted.²⁴ During the rendering of a Spanish poem,

Xavière is as if in a trance and Françoise suffers another access of panic:

'Xavière ne regardait plus la femme, elle fixait le vide; une cigarette se consumait entre ses doigts et la braise commençait à atteindre sa chair sans qu'elle parût s'en apercevoir; elle semblait plongée dans une extase hystérique. Françoise passa la main sur son front; elle était en sueur, l'atmosphère était étouffante et au-dedans d'elle-même, ses pensées brûlaient comme des flammes. Cette présence ennemie qui s'était révélée tout à l'heure dans un sourire de folle devenait de plus en plus proche, il n'y avait plus moyen d'en éviter le dévoilement terrifiant; jour après jour, minute après minute, Françoise avait fui le danger, mais c'en était fait, elle l'avait enfin rencontré cet infranchissable obstacle qu'elle avait pressenti sous des formes incertaines depuis sa plus petite enfance; à travers la jouissance maniaque de Xavière, à travers sa haine et sa jalousie, le scandale éclatait, aussi monstrueux, aussi définitif que la mort; en face de Françoise, et cependant sans elle, quelque chose existait comme une condamnation sans recours: libre, absolu, irréductible, une conscience étrangère se dressait.

(*L'Invitée*, pp. 363-64.)

Again one is struck by the heightened and intense tone of the text. Readers of *L'Invitée*, like readers of Gothic romance, are placed in a state of suspense and uncertainty.²⁵ The text is building to a crescendo; words are piled on words, clause upon clause in a long sentence (nine lines, one hundred and thirteen words) that seems to draw readers into

²³ See p. 375 where Françoise discusses her crisis with Pierre.

²⁴ Toril Moi suggests that Xavière deliberately burns herself on two occasions and that it is 'when Xavière tries to burn herself for the second time' that Françoise reacts vehemently (*Simone de Beauvoir*, p. 115). In fact, during the rendering of the Spanish poem, Xavière seems to be in a kind of hysterical trance and a lit cigarette between her fingers has burnt down and begins to scorch her flesh. Françoise's reaction is due to her recollection of the previous incident in a charged atmosphere. See *L'Invitée*, p. 363.

²⁵ See Kilgour, Maggie, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, London: Routledge, 1995, p. 6.

the text, enacting the weight of language and reproducing Françoise's feelings of suffocation.²⁶ Together, these passages represent one of the climaxes in the novel. It is at this point that Françoise realises that Xavière is a threat, not only to her happiness, but to her very existence. The final key passage I wish to consider is the culmination of the text that is reached as Françoise comes to the decision that Xavière must die. This passage too, is characterised by hyperbole.

[Françoise] traversa le couloir, elle titubait comme une aveugle, les larmes brûlaient ses yeux: 'J'ai été jalouse d'elle. Je lui ai pris Gerbert.' Les larmes brûlaient, les mots brûlaient comme un fer rouge. Elle s'assit au bord du divan et répéta hébétée: 'J'ai fait cela. C'est moi.' Dans les ténèbres, le visage de Gerbert brûlait d'un feu noir, et les lettres sur le tapis étaient noires comme un pacte infernal. Elle porta son mouchoir à ses lèvres. Une lave noire et torride coulait dans ses veines. Elle aurait voulu mourir.

(*L'Invitée*, p. 499.)

A succession of short and asyntactic sentences convey Françoise's distress, their rhythm could almost be the rhythm of broken sobs. Repetition adds to the intensity of the text; 'brûler', 'larmes', 'noir'. The same motifs are found again a few lines later: 'Elle ferma les yeux. Les larmes coulaient, la lave brûlante coulait et consumait le coeur' (p. 500). Françoise has finally come face to face with the threat to her being, 'elle était tombée dans le piège, elle était à la merci de cette conscience vorace qui avait attendu dans l'ombre le moment de l'engloutir' (p. 500). This writing relies on hyperbole for its impact.

In each case, the relating of these three incidents gives rise to a meta-commentary on language. Excess results from language coming up against the inexpressable. What is threatening Françoise is beyond language, beyond thought even. 'On ne pouvait pas s'en approcher même en pensée, au moment où elle touchait au but, la pensée se dissolvait; ce n'était aucun objet saisissable, c'était un incessant

²⁶ Language in *L'Invitée* will be treated in more detail in Chapter Three.

jaillissement et une fuite incessante, transparente pour soi seule et à jamais impénétrable' (pp. 354-55). Only contradiction, language pushed to the limit of meaningfulness, can begin to express the nature of the threat:

C'était comme la mort, une totale négation, une éternelle absence, et cependant par une contradiction bouleversante, ce gouffre de néant pouvait se rendre présent à soi-même et se faire exister pour soi avec plénitude; l'univers tout entier s'engloutissait en lui, et Françoise, à jamais dépossédée du monde, se dissolvait elle-même dans ce vide dont aucun mot, aucune image ne pouvait cerner le contour infini.

(*L'Invitée*, p. 364.)²⁷

The threat is like death and not like it, excessive and immeasurable. Language cannot remove the threats to Françoise's existence, 'on ne pouvait pas se défendre avec des mots timides' (pp. 500-501).

This is an important realisation for Françoise who, before this crisis, had used language to ward off the unthinkable. Language guarantees our existence and identity; we must be able to say 'I am' (p. 146). Language confers reality. For Françoise, 'tant qu'elle ne l'avait raconté à Pierre, aucun événement n'était tout à fait vrai: il flottait, immobile, incertain, dans des espèces de limbes' (p. 30).²⁸ This attitude is discussed by Elizabeth Fallaize in relation to the concept of Françoise and Pierre's indivisibility.²⁹ I should like to modulate slightly her argument that Françoise 'has an unshakable belief in the power of words'. This is true in the sense that Françoise, a writer, never loses her fear of the power of narrative or representation (see below), however, as Françoise's crisis deepens, language lets her down. Her belief that 'dès qu'elle aurait expliqué les choses à Pierre, tout serait effacé' (p. 195) is disappointed. Likewise her hope that 'si elle arrivait à enfermer dans des phrases son angoisse, elle pourrait s'en arracher'; 'les

²⁷ See earlier too: 'Les mots ne pouvaient que vous rapprocher du mystère mais sans le rendre moins impénétrable' (p. 162).

²⁸ Xavière accuses Françoise and Pierre of substituting language for life. 'Vous aviez l'air de vivre les choses pour une fois, et pas seulement de les parler' (p. 253).

²⁹ Fallaize, *The Novels*, p. 37.

mots ne la délivraient pas' (p. 369). As language becomes problematical, Françoise comes to see it as part of her predicament rather than as a solution. Language itself is inherently mysterious and ambiguous. Emblematic of this and a Gothic moment in the text is the illegible note, written on a torn piece of paper, that Xavière slipped under Françoise's door ('les dernières phrases étaient tout à fait illisibles') and the illegible notice she pinned to her door ('un gribouillage illisible'). '— C'est illisible, dit Pierre. Il considéra un moment les signes mystérieux' (pp. 387-88). Language, 'des signes ambigus' (p. 160), is duplicitous. Françoise loses her trust in words (p. 145). She wonders: 'On se sert tant de mots; mais qu'y a-t-il au juste dessous?' (p. 159). 'Derrière les mots et les gestes, qu'y avait-il?' (p. 166). And Françoise is forced into a position where she never knows what anything means. 'Les phrases de Xavière étaient toujours à double sens.' (p. 294) She is reduced to guessing (p. 314).

Excess that is manifest in Simone de Beauvoir's writing is present on a thematic level too. In *L'Invitée*, the confrontation between consciousnesses, signalled in the epigraph, is related in terms of Gothic excess. It is a fight to the death. Literally. This confrontation is overlain by the mortal battle for narrative authority;³⁰ Françoise will kill Xavière who wishes to 'se saisir de Françoise et la faire entrer de force dans son histoire' (p. 491). Her fear is a Gothic fear of the power of representation.³¹ Françoise's sense of identity is intimately threatened by Xavière. It is as if she were reduced to a character in Xavière's fiction, as if her identity were nothing more than an effect of Xavière's narrative. She will kill Xavière in order to be able to tell her own story, to

³⁰ There is a third struggle taking place too. This struggle is an allegorical battle: 'A la longue, le caprice, l'intransigeance, l'égoïsme superbe, toutes ces valeurs truquées, avaient dévoilé leur faiblesse et c'était les vieilles vertus dédaignées qui remportaient la victoire. J'ai gagné, pensa Françoise avec triomphe' (p. 467). Françoise's satisfaction is premature. In any case, readers may find it difficult to concur, asking themselves exactly which virtues she has in mind. Françoise has made much of jettisoning her 'âme pure' and this 'victory' seems to reside in deceiving and lying to Xavière. A signal example of *mauvaise foi*?

³¹ This aspect of Gothic fiction is discussed by Botting. See pp. 14, 157, 171.

impose her version of the truth. Françoise destroys the flesh and blood Xavière so as to destroy Xavière's narrative: 'Jalouse, traîtresse, criminelle. On ne pouvait pas se défendre avec des mots timides et des actes furtifs. Xavière existait, la trahison existait. Elle existe en chair et en os, ma criminelle figure. Elle n'existera plus' (pp. 500-501). As Elizabeth Fallaize argues, 'she crushes the claim of another to narrate her story'.³²

L'Invitée is Gothic in its violence. The novel celebrates Françoise's criminal behaviour. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick tells us that the most characteristic energies of the Gothic novel concern the impossibility of restoring to their original oneness characters divided from themselves.³³ A Gothic preoccupation with the dissolution of the self runs through *L'Invitée* as a whole. Françoise's identity progressively disintegrates in her encounter with Xavière; as we read at one of the crisis points in the novel, 'Françoise, à jamais dépossédée du monde, se dissolvait elle-même dans ce vide' (p. 364). She is divided from herself: 'séparée d'elle-même' (p. 301); 'Françoise considéra avec horreur cette femme qui était elle', (p. 499). She can only reintegrate her personality through sacrificial violence. As Xavière is dying, the the final words of the text assert: 'C'était sa volonté qui était en train de s'accomplir, plus rien ne la séparait d'elle-même. Elle avait enfin choisi. Elle s'était choisie.' On another level Xavière comes between Françoise and Pierre who assert their unity: 'Toi et moi, on ne fait qu'un; c'est vrai tu sais, on ne peut pas nous définir l'un sans l'autre' (p. 29). When Françoise disagrees with Pierre over Xavière, Françoise 'avait l'impression pénible d'être divisée contre elle-même' (p. 133). Violence is Françoise's only chance to reintegrate the sundered elements. The text vindicates Françoise but she is also depicted as a monster.³⁴

L'Invitée undermines villain/ victim and villain/ heroine dichotomies and ultimately

³² Fallaize, *The Novels*, p.36.

³³ Sedgwick, pp. 12-13.

³⁴ Simone de Beauvoir refers to her as such in *La Force de l'âge*, p.348.

subverts the Gothic convention itself; our villain/ heroine triumphs and readers are deprived of the expected Gothic closure advancing moral resolutions.³⁵

Xavière, whose very existence is conceived as a threat to Françoise's sense of identity, the embodiment of the threat to Françoise, is constructed by the text as a demoniacal, non-human figure. The mystery and threat that Xavière represents is accentuated by the fact that she appears in the text with no introduction. Her relationship with Françoise before the point when they are sitting in the Moorish café together (p. 21) is not elucidated. Like other Gothic characters, Xavière, an orphan, appears as if she were out of nowhere, with almost no history, like a mysterious foundling. As Simone de Beauvoir writes in *La Force de l'âge*, the novel begins when 'une étrangère' enters Françoise and Pierre's life (p. 346). Mystery is reinforced by the fact that, when abbreviated, Xavière's name is 'X'. When she burns herself she is portrayed as crazy and dangerous. One of the most disturbing elements at this point in the text, and one that is picked up again as Françoise suffers her second crisis of the evening, is Xavière's smile: 'un sourire aigu retroussait ses lèvres; c'était un sourire intime et solitaire comme un sourire de folle, un sourire voluptueux et torturé de femme en proie au plaisir' (p. 354), 'ce rictus maniaque' (p. 354), and 'un sourire de folle' (p. 363). Xavière's smile encapsulates her madness. Xavière's madness is not foregrounded but is all the more 'threatening' in the way it is hinted at. During the Christmas Eve party Xavière's response to Paule's dance reveals her susceptibility and foreshadows the incidents in the night-club: 'la bouche entreouverte, les yeux embués, Xavière respirait avec peine; elle ne savait plus où elle était, elle semblait hors d'elle-même; Françoise détournait les yeux avec gêne, l'insistance de Pierre était indiscrete et presque obscène; ce visage de

³⁵ See Botting, pp. 7-8. He points out that some moral endings were, in any case, no more than 'perfunctory tokens'.

possédée n'était pas fait pour être vu' (p. 184). Xavière's reaction to Pierre's telling Françoise that Xavière and he are in love is suggestive of madness: 'Xavière se débattait sans secours parmi ces menaces écrasantes qu'elle apercevait tout autour d'elle, seule comme une hallucinée' (p. 255). Xavière's room is described as 'un cachot d'hallucinée' (p. 342). Françoise wonders about Xavière's sanity because of her violent reaction to having had sex with Gerbert: 'Et si Xavière était devenue brusquement folle?' (p. 387). There is only one other reference to Xavière's madness: during a quarrel with Pierre, Xavière 'le regarda d'un air rusé et triomphant de folle' (p. 414) and after the quarrel we read: 'elle semblait possédée par un démon furieux' (p. 416).³⁶

Xavière's smile is a motif that has recurred from the very first time that Xavière was introduced. Multiple references to her smile punctuate the text.³⁷ For the most part her smiles are connoted negatively, connected with scorn, malice and cruelty. Her first smile, 'un drôle de sourire', expressing 'mépris', 'méchanceté' and a 'jugement malveillant' (p. 36), gives Françoise an unpleasant shock. The term 'rictus' that is commonly used to denote Xavière's smiles suggests an unnatural, twisted smile and the image of an animal baring its teeth is often conveyed. Her smiles are frequently secretive and mysterious, expressing connivance with herself. Examples are plentiful. One of the most striking is when Xavière smiles to herself, imagining sadistic sexual pleasure: 'Les lèvres de Xavière se retroussèrent sur ses dents blanches. "Je le ferais souffrir", dit-elle d'un air voluptueux. Françoise la regarda avec un peu de malaise [...]. A quelle image d'elle-même cachée aux yeux de tous souriait-elle avec une mystérieuse connivence? [...] Le rictus s'effaça' (pp. 228-29). Elsewhere Xavière's smile is clearly described in terms of vaginal imagery. It is depicted as dangerous, a wound infected by

³⁶ The threat to Françoise's sanity, as opposed to her identity, is underplayed in the text. This will be discussed more fully in a later chapter.

³⁷ Toril Moi notes how Xavière's mouth is repeatedly emphasised and discusses references to her smile *Simone de Beauvoir*, p. 116.

jealousy: 'une passion de haine et de souffrance gonflait sa face, où la bouche s'entrouvrait dans un rictus semblable à la blessure d'un fruit trop mûr; par cette plaie béante, éclatait au soleil une pulpe secrète et vénéneuse' (p. 407). This is a vivid, horrific Gothic image.³⁸ Repeated references to Xavière's smile, which is not a smile, accumulate in the text and contribute to the creation of a threatening, demoniacal persona. To a great extent it is the accumulation of this motif in the text that accounts for its symbolical power.³⁹

Animal imagery associated with Xavière reinforces the impression that she is demoniacal. The bestial within the human is, as already noted, a characteristically Gothic theme. These powerful images can suggest slaughter and cannibalism. The word 'proie' reappears over and over in the text.⁴⁰ Françoise becomes aware that Xavière is 'charnelle' (animal, sensual) when they are out dancing and when, once again, Xavière's sexual fantasies are under discussion: 'Les yeux avides, les mains, les dents aiguës que découvraient les lèvres entrouvertes cherchaient quelque chose à saisir, quelque chose qui se touche. Xavière ne savait pas encore quoi: les sons, les couleurs, les parfums, les corps, tout lui était une proie' (pp. 311-12). Pierre, who has been surreptitiously watching Xavière whom he suspects of falling in love with Gerbert, tells Françoise that it is as if Xavière wants to eat up Gerbert. Françoise remembers Xavière's 'regard avide'

³⁸ The word 'plaie' recalls Xavière's self inflicted wound p. 354.

³⁹ This list will indicate just how frequently references to Xavière's smile recur:

'sourire furtif, de connivence avec elle-même' (p. 68)

'en retroussant un peu sa lèvre supérieure' (p. 72)

'elle eut une sorte de rictus' (p. 75)

'le rictus s'accentua' (p. 124)

'sourire de connivence secrète' (p. 190)

'elle eut une rictus presque douloureux' (p. 253)

'un drôle de rictus haineux' (p. 308)

'Au milieu de son visage blême ses lèvres étaient contractées dans un rictus de pierre.' (p. 366)

'la bouche entrouverte dans un vague rictus' (p. 395)

'un rictus retroussa sa lèvre supérieure' (p. 416)

'La lèvre de Xavière se retroussa sur ses dents blanches.' (p. 495)

'un rictus tordait sa bouche' (p. 498)

'un intolérable sourire découvrait ses dents pures' (p. 498)

⁴⁰ Examples: pp. 312, 354, 364, 365.

(p. 243). Shortly after the episode in the night-club, Françoise realises she has been powerless against 'la haine, la tendresse, les pensées de Xavière; elle les avait laissées mordre sur elle, elle avait fait d'elle-même une proie' (p. 364) and she feels impelled to run away from Xavière and her 'tentacules avides qui voulaient la dévorer toute vive' (p. 367). In her room Xavière is like an animal in her den; the terms 'se terrer' and 'ruminer' are used (disturbingly discordant with the term 'cloîtrée' used in the same sentence). According to Pierre, Xavière 'se terre dans son coin comme une bête malade' (p. 163). To Françoise, listening behind Xavière's door, it is as if Xavière's thoughts are alive, as if they are 'animal': 'on aurait cru entendre palpiter les secrètes pensées que Xavière caressait dans sa solitude' (p. 341). Xavière's crying is described as a 'plainte animale' (p. 386) and Françoise imagines her 'traquée dans un coin' (p. 387). The sexual associations of the powerful animal image of Xavière that opens the final episode of *L'Invitée* are unmistakable: 'Une femelle, pensa [Françoise] avec passion. [...] Elle était là, tapie derrière la porte, dans son nid de mensonges.' (p. 491) The animalisation of Xavière combined with the sense of hidden danger make this a supremely Gothic image, full of dread.⁴¹

This animal imagery is in sharp contrast to the religious overtones of other images. For example, Françoise hesitates before going into Xavière's room: 'c'était vraiment un lieu sacré; il s'y célébrait plus d'un culte, mais la divinité suprême vers qui montaient la fumée des cigarettes blondes et les parfums de thé et de lavande, c'était Xavière elle-même, telle que ses propres yeux la contemplaient' (p.166). (This is consistent with Xavière's manner when attending to herself: 'Il y avait dans ses gestes quelque chose de rituel et de mystérieux' and having taken off her scarf 'elle redescendit sur terre' (p.226).) Xavière is divine then as well as animal. The resulting discordance

⁴¹ This is not the first mention of a nest in connection with Xavière. See p. 152.

adds to readers' uneasiness. However, religion here is distorted; the worship taking place is suggestive of idolatry and narcissism, cigarette smoke and perfume replace incense and the 'lueur sanglante' in the room (p. 167) is redolent of sacrifice. Another memorable religious image occurs in the final lines of Part One of *L'Invitée*; Françoise refers to Xavière as a miracle in her life:

Elle était en train de se dessécher à l'abri des constructions patientes et des lourdes pensées de plomb, lorsque soudain, dans un éclatement de pureté et de liberté, tout ce monde trop humain était tombé en poussière; il avait suffi du regard naïf de Xavière pour détruire cette prison et maintenant, sur cette terre délivrée, mille merveilles allaient naître par la grâce de ce jeune ange exigeant. Un ange sombre avec de douces mains de femme, rouges comme des mains paysannes, avec des lèvres à l'odeur de miel, de tabac blond et de thé vert.

(*L'Invitée*, pp. 264-65.)

This dramatic metaphor is Gothic in its emphasis on weight and imprisonment and it is perfectly integrated in the dense symbolic network of *L'Invitée*. (See later.) What is of particular interest here is the religious diction employed, 'terre délivrée', 'grâce', 'jeune ange', and the discordances set up; the angel is 'exigeant' and 'sombre', paradoxically it is this dark, destructive angel bringing light into Françoise's life (see later for further discussion of light and dark in *L'Invitée*). The sexual overtones of the image are unmistakable. Xavière is surely a fallen angel. According to Xavière herself, her soul is black; it is the bond she claims with Pierre in opposition to Françoise's 'âme pure'. She says to Pierre: 'Vous et moi, nous ne sommes pas des créatures morales, [...] Au fond vous êtes aussi traître que moi et vous avez l'âme aussi noire' (p. 443). Xavière's divinity is diabolical. Discordance is set up and resolved. Brought together, the two groups of images, animal and religious, ultimately reinforce each other and the impression of uneasiness conveyed is accentuated.⁴²

⁴² Religious diction is frequently used in connection with the trio and their relationships. Xavière venerates Françoise, pp. 137, 312, 397 and Pierre, p.227. Françoise reveres Xavière, pp. 228, 262 and Pierre, 374. An explicit religious image casts Pierre as a Christ figure and Françoise and Xavière as Marthe and Marie (p. 493).

The notion that Xavière casts a shadow on Françoise's life is recurrent. In this example Xavière is defined as a mystery beyond language: 'Les mots ne pouvaient que vous rapprocher du mystère mais sans le rendre moins impénétrable: il ne faisait qu'étendre sur le coeur une ombre plus froide.' (p. 162.) As the narrative enters its final stages, we read: 'Xavière s'obstinait à demeurer cette étrangère dont la présence refusée étendait sur Françoise une ombre menaçante.' (p. 420.) And on the evening before Françoise will kill Xavière, Françoise again refers to Xavière as 'cette présence ennemie qui étendait sur elle, sur le monde entier, une ombre pernicieuse' (p. 484).

One of the recurring motifs associated with Xavière is her smell. References to her smell are disquieting and add to her malignant aspect. They underline her mysteriousness and hint of the supernatural. It is a motif closely linked to the religious imagery and becomes a condensed reminder of Xavière's 'divinity/ fiendishness'. From the beginning, Françoise is tempted by Xavière's 'léger parfum de risque et de mystère' (p. 39). Smells associated with Xavière were important elements of the religious images already quoted: 'la fumée des cigarettes blondes et les parfums de thé et de lavande', (p. 166); 'lèvres à l'odeur de miel, de tabac blond et de thé vert' (p. 265). Xavière's smell becomes an obsession for Françoise; as she tries and fails to imagine Pierre and Xavière together in Xavière's room, it is one of the things she focuses on (p. 162). When Françoise herself is invited to spend the evening in Xavière's room, she enjoys 'cette lumière funèbre, et cette odeur de fleurs mortes et de chair vivante qui flottait toujours autour de Xavière' (p. 168). Somehow death and living flesh are conflated here; the effect is sinister. The gap between Françoise's pleasure and readers' response produces disquiet.⁴³ When they dance together, Françoise appreciates Xavière's smell: 'avec

⁴³ This disparity pervades the whole episode. Xavière, 'les yeux brillants de satisfaction', appears to take sadistic pleasure in seeing Françoise, who hates tomatoes, 'absorber une épaisse purée de tomates'. It is impossible to concur with Françoise's indulgent reaction that 'il aurait fallu être un roc pour ne pas être touchée de sa joie' (p. 168-69).

tendresse, elle respira l'odeur de thé, de miel et de chair qui était l'odeur de Xavière' (p. 186). The repetition of 'chair' in particular, recalls the menacing associations that have been built up in the text until now, associations that again clash with Françoise's positive experience. Her disquiet is not aroused until she smells a new, mysterious odour: 'mêlée au parfum de tabac blond et de thé qui flottait toujours autour de Xavière, une étrange odeur d'hôpital'. (p. 418-19.) Suspense concerning the 'odeur insolite' (p. 422) is built up until Françoise realises that Xavière has been smelling ether (p. 423). This too, has Gothic resonances.

Xavière's facial expressions are frequently referred to as a grimace.⁴⁴ Of course, a grimace is a facial expression closely related to a rictus. A grimace is not an attractive look. Paradoxically, Xavière is both ugly and beautiful. Her face is transformed almost miraculously from one to the other.⁴⁵ Her beauty is diabolical; when Xavière confronts Françoise over her affair with Gerbert, emphasis is placed on fire and burning, motifs that have gathered momentum in the text and which are emblematic of hell: 'Elle fixait sur Françoise des yeux brûlants, ses joues étaient en feu, elle était belle' (p. 498). Her face exemplifies her duplicity, being at once expressive and indecipherable and full of contradictions, inhuman almost. We read: 'Elle avait un séduisant visage, si nuancé, si changeant qu'il ne semblait pas fait de chair; il était fait d'extases, de rancunes, de tristesses, rendues magiquement sensibles aux yeux; pourtant malgré cette transparence éthérée, le dessin du nez, de la bouche était lourdement sensuel' (p. 75).⁴⁶ The same idea is repeated later in the book: 'Son visage décomposé par la fatigue et par l'angoisse semblait plus impalpable encore que coutume' (p. 263). Françoise feels that 'on n'avait

⁴⁴ See 'grimace' (p. 22), 'grimace tragique' (p. 41), 'grimace de dégoût' (p. 42), 'affreuse grimace' (p. 53), 'grimace' (p. 120).

⁴⁵ For example, when Françoise and Xavière leave the Moorish café. Compare: 'Le dessous de ses yeux était gonflé, son teint brouillé' (p. 24) with 'Ses yeux brillaient, elle avait retrouvé son beau teint nacré' (p. 25).

⁴⁶ This is the second mention of Xavière's 'nez sensuel'. See p. 32.

jamais fini de découvrir ce visage. Xavière était une incessante nouveauté' (p. 284). She has the uncanny feeling that a stranger is hidden behind Xavière's familiar features (p. 229), her 'imprévisible visage' (p. 333). Xavière's face is a mask. Discordant language reproduces the contradictions on a textual level. 'Ce visage parfumé, tout bruissant de tendresse, quelles pensées vénéneuses l'avaient soudain altéré? Elles s'épanouissaient avec malignité sous ce petit front têtu, à l'abri des cheveux de soie, et Françoise était sans défense contre elles [...]' (p. 293).⁴⁷ Xavière's 'traître visage' and 'traits sans mystère' are asserted as equivalents and in her dependence, Françoise would like to collude with the mirage, with the 'illusions charmantes' which hide 'mille venins cachés' (p. 404). Françoise is repelled by Xavière's 'frais visage cruel' (p. 482). In a typically Gothic fashion the text fosters ambiguity. Xavière's innocent, childlike face is asserted as equivalent to her evil face. She is demoniacal and animal and she is also 'une petite fille aimante et désarmée dont on aurait voulu couvrir de baisers les joues nacrées' (p. 48), she opens wide her 'pure' eyes and smiles charmingly (p. 79), Françoise wants to believe that Xavière's 'traits charmants composaient une honnête figure d'enfant et non un masque inquiétant de magicienne' (p. 168). Her denial only confirms it to be so.

Is Xavière an instance of the Gothic split personality? This reading is supported by the text to some extent. She does display the self hatred of the Gothic (anti)heroine: 'Elle fixa dans le vide un regard farouche et dit à voix basse: "Je me dégoûte, j'ai horreur de moi"' (p. 131). Pierre tells Françoise about Xavière's 'crise de dégoût d'elle-même' (p. 162); he believes that 'tout est si pur en elle et si violent' and recognises in her a need 'de faire du mal, de se faire du mal, et de se faire haïr' (p. 164). Nevertheless the ambiguity remains, residing in our dependance on a narrator who is far from impartial, not to say unreliable. Xavière is denied the opportunity to tell her own story.

⁴⁷ The original title of *L'Invitée* was 'Légitime défense'.

Xavière is not the only demoniacal character in *L'Invitée*. Françoise, we have noted, can be read as a monster. Élisabeth is also an evil figure. Moreover, she is constructed as Françoise's double in the text. Evil doubles are stock Gothic characters. Interestingly, Élisabeth progressively 'disappears' from the text as Françoise jettisons her fine moral scruples. (The Françoise : Élisabeth duo will be explored further in Chapter Three.)⁴⁸

The fear and horror evoked in the climactic moments and elsewhere in *L'Invitée*, is characteristic of the Gothic. The effects produced, Françoise's dread and her feelings of revulsion, are best understood in the light of Freud's notion of the uncanny. What happens in the night-club is a good illustration of this; what is horrible and dangerous is hidden behind Xavière's smile: 'Il recélait quelque chose d'horrible [...] Derrière ce rictus maniaque, un danger menaçait, plus définitif que tous ceux qu'elle avait jamais imaginés' (p. 354). Françoise is horrified that something that she has known and feared since she was a small child is now going to be revealed: 'il n'y avait plus moyen d'en éviter le dévoilement terrifiant; jour après jour, minute après minute, Françoise avait fui le danger, mais c'en était fait, elle l'avait enfin rencontré cet infranchissable obstacle qu'elle avait pressenti sous des formes incertaines depuis sa plus petite enfance' (p. 363). What should have remained hidden is about to be exposed, the repressed to return. The fact that the danger is undetermined heightens the sense of mystery and fear. These episodes epitomise what Botting finds to be one of the defining characteristics of Gothic texts, namely 'a sense of a grotesque, irrational and menacing presence pervading the everyday and causing its decomposition'.⁴⁹ The sense of something strange and

⁴⁸ In *L'Invitée* there is a whole cast of minor Gothic figures: ghosts, pp. 147, 179, 359; puppets, pp. 153, 179, 335 (associated with death), et al.; Françoise is described as 'une vieille machine déréglée' p. 434, Paule dances 'la danse des machines' pp. 182-83; Xavière is described as a monk, a Gothic figure connected with mystery and evil, p. 481. Conventual imagery is typically Gothic; note the use of the term 'cloîtrée' associated with Xavière.

⁴⁹ Botting, p. 160.

threatening hidden behind everydayness is something that recurs throughout *L'Invitée* where the banal and the sinister are juxtaposed.⁵⁰

As the novel reaches its climax, Françoise's distress is heightened as 'derrière chacun de ces meubles familiers, quelque chose d'horrible guettait' (p. 498). This recalls Élisabeth's experience during her quarrel with Claude when she was aware that 'dans l'ombre quelque chose d'horrible menaçait' (p. 100). This, in turn, recalls Françoise's memory of an incident during her childhood when she had found herself alone in her grandmother's house: 'c'était drôle et ça faisait peur; les meubles avaient l'air de tous les jours, mais en même temps ils étaient tous changés: tout épais, tout lourds, tout secrets; sous la bibliothèque et sous la console de marbre stagnait une ombre épaisse.' (p. 146). The idea of someone or something lurking in the shadows recurs as the novel reaches its culmination when we read: 'cette conscience vorace qui avait attendu dans l'ombre le moment de l'engloutir' (p. 500).

An atmosphere of mystery and secrecy pervades the text which fosters ambiguity. Words, sentences, events have multiple or uncertain meanings. Questions are a distinguishing feature of the text. The words 'mystère', 'mystérieux', 'secret' constantly reappear. There are 'mystérieuses perturbations' when Françoise knocks at Xavière's door (p. 45). When Françoise imagines the café where Xavière and Pierre are meeting, 'tout avait revêtu un sens mystérieux' and Françoise will never know 'le secret de leur tête-à-tête' (pp. 152-53). Françoise surprises Xavière looking at Gerbert: 'c'était comme une impérieuse et secrète prise de possession' (p. 186). Xavière enfolds Pierre's image in a 'mystérieuse caresse' (p. 493). It is only natural that in this atmosphere, whispering should be a recurring motif.⁵¹

⁵⁰ The cigarette ash deposited on Xavière's burn is 'le petit matelas protecteur' (p. 354). The benign everydayness of the object jars with sinister role it is playing here.

⁵¹ See pp. 215, 255, 378.

There are repeated references to magic and the supernatural in *L'Invitée*.

Françoise, Pierre and Xavière and Élisabeth are all portrayed as victims of spells that have been cast over them. After the incident in the night-club, it is as if the trio have been turned to stone by a magic spell (p. 365 and 366). Earlier, '[Françoise] avait envie de briser ce cercle magique où elle se trouvait retenue avec Pierre et Xavière et qui la séparait de tout le reste du monde' (p. 345). After a pleasant evening spent alone with Pierre, Françoise believes, 'enfin ce cercle de passion et de souci où la sorcellerie de Xavière les retenait s'était rompu et ils se trouvaient tout mêlés l'un à l'autre au coeur du monde immense' (p. 377). (Note the contrast with images of enclosure that generally predominate.) But minutes later her hopes are dashed; Pierre sees a light under Xavière's door and his obsession takes over again. Françoise is overcome by despair, 'il lui [à Françoise] semblait s'être laissée leurrer par la précaire lucidité d'un fou qu'un souffle suffisait à rejeter dans le délire' (p. 378). In these examples, emphasis is laid on enforced immobility, an idea linked with weight and enclosure. In Élisabeth's case, she believes that a spell has been cast that makes her incapable of authentic existence: 'C'était un sort qui lui avait été jeté: elle changeait tout ce qu'elle touchait en carton-pâte.' (p. 272.) Xavière blames magic for making her destructive: 'Oh! Il y a un malheur sur moi, gémit-elle passionnément (p. 130). She feels she is beyond help because she is 'marquée' (p. 132).⁵² Thus Xavière is portrayed as a victim of magic but, as we have seen, she is constructed as a demoniacal figure in the text and she is also portrayed as a witch and magical powers are attributed to her. There are multiple references to her as 'une sorcière' (pp. 190, 192, 298), 'l'ensorceleuse' (p. 491) and Françoise is afraid of her powers: 'ce masque attirant, c'était une ruse, elle ne céderait pas à cette sorcellerie

⁵² In the dramatic scene in Françoise's hospital room which follows Pierre's declaration that Xavière and he love each other, Xavière exclaims: 'C'est un malheur, j'en suis sûre, je ne suis pas de force' (p. 255).

[...] elle savait seulement qu'un danger la menaçait' (p. 164). Xavière's malevolence is reiterated in the text; as *L'Invitée* reaches its climax, Françoise imagines Xavière, 'dans la lumière mortuaire de sa chambre, [...] assise, enveloppée de son peignoir brun, maussade et maléfique' (p. 490). The detail of the brown dressing gown is telling, as evocative perhaps of a witch's robe as it is of a monk's habit.⁵³ In a central series of images, Xavière's hatred and, metonymically Xavière herself, become an embodiment of magic, an evil spell. Françoise is depicted as imagining, containing and controlling this spell with magic of her own. It is worth quoting a key passage in full as it contains a rich web of resonances.

Est-ce qu'on ne pouvait pas contempler la haine de Xavière en face, tout juste comme les gâteaux au fromage qui reposaient sur un plateau? Ils étaient d'un beau jaune clair, décorés d'astragales roses, on aurait presque eu envie d'en manger si on eût ignoré leur goût aigre de nouveau-né. Cette petite tête ronde n'occupait pas beaucoup plus de place dans le monde, on l'enfermait dans un seul regard; et ces brumes de haine qui s'en échappaient en tourbillon, si on les faisait rentrer dans leur boîte, on les tiendrait aussi à sa merci. Il n'y avait qu'un mot à dire: dans un écroulement plein de fracas la haine se résoudrait en une fumée exactement contenue dans le corps de Xavière et aussi inoffensive que le goût sur caché sous la crème jaune des gâteaux; elle se sentait exister, mais ça ne faisait guère de différence, en vain se tordait elle en volutes rageuses: on verrait tout juste passer sur le visage désarmé quelques remous imprévus et réglés comme des nuages au ciel.

(*L'Invitée*, p. 301.)

Xavière's pernicious spell might be shut up in a box, reduced to vapour/ fumes. There are strong echos of genies here. Once contained, Xavière's spell would be as harmless, that is harmful, as the pale yellow cheesecakes. Xavière's head is conflated with the cakes; they are on a tray and there are clear suggestions of beheading. (The mention of the pink decorations adds to the sinister overtones.) There are numerous other Gothic features in this passage. Like Xavière, the cakes are not what they seem, their true nature is hidden. They may look appetizing but their taste is sour. The 'goût aigre de

⁵³ See p. 481.

nouveau -né' is a repellant, disgusting image with overtones of cannibalism and evil.⁵⁴

The cakes have already acquired symbolic significance; Françoise's thoughts about 'un énorme gâteau blanc, garni de fruits et d'astragales' interrupt a story she is telling that no one is listening to (p. 73). The sickly cake comes to stand for her alienation, her sickness at heart. The same image recurs later, this time connected directly with Xavière: 'elle remplissait la pensée aussi lourdement que le gros gâteau du Pôle Nord' (p. 83). The image of a crumbling building is typically Gothic and ties up with other images of glossy exteriors that hide rotting interiors and risk sudden collapse.

Françoise's power to contain and control Xavière's 'spell' resides in her own gaze and in her use of language. For one moment Françoise imagines she has succeeded, that her words have worked. The text is interrupted by Pierre taking his leave. Sixteen lines later Françoise has to acknowledge that she is powerless to resist Xavière's evil magic, she does not believe her own words. The text goes on as if there had been no interruption: 'le mot magique, il aurait fallu qu'il jaillît du fond de son âme, mais son âme était tout engourdie. Le brouillard maléfique restait suspendu à travers le monde, il empoisonnait les bruits et les lumières, il pénétrait Françoise jusqu'aux moelles' (p. 302). This image is akin to those images relating Xavière to a shadow that looms over Françoise's life. It is reiterated later, after the climactic moments in the night-club: 'ça faisait des semaines que Françoise n'était plus capable de réduire en inoffensives fumées la haine, la tendresse, les pensées de Xavière' (p. 364). Poison is a recurrent Gothic motif in *L'Invitée* and one frequently linked with Xavière.⁵⁵ In a related image, Xavière's hatred is compared to an acid producing noxious fumes.⁵⁶ This image occurs after Xavière has

⁵⁴ The adjective 'aigre' recalls the morning when Françoise asked Xavière to come to live in Paris (p. 252). See also p. 192.

⁵⁵ See earlier quotations: 'mille venins cachés' (p. 404), 'pulpe secrète et vénéneuse' (p. 407).

⁵⁶ Interestingly, these images are akin to images of unreason that, according to Foucault, inspired such fear in the middle of the eighteenth century: 'Tout d'abord le mal entre en fermentation dans les espaces clos de l'internement. Il a toutes les vertus qu'on prête à l'acide [...]. Le mélange aussitôt

harmed herself and before Françoise suffers her second crisis in the night-club: 'Ça reprenait: à nouveau corrosive comme un acide, la haine s'échappait de Xavière en lourdes volutes; c'était inutile de se défendre contre cette morsure déchirante [...]' (p. 361).⁵⁷

Françoise's experience with the fortune teller adds to the strange and Gothic atmosphere in the novel. The Gypsy appears to know all about Françoise's life. She takes her to one side and, in secret, tells Françoise that she knows about the unhappiness that Xavière has brought into her relationship with Pierre and offers to sell her a charm that will make her happy again (pp. 158-59). The whole episode is redolent of the Gothic; the pathetic fallacy 'cette bruine poisseuse avait pénétré jusqu'au fond de son âme', the presence on stage of 'une grande poupée [...] qui paraissait presque vivante' (p. 153), Françoise trembles and holds out her hand 'machinalement' (mechanically/without thinking), and the secrecy and magic. There is also the strange, unsettling suggestion that the future is already mapped out and can be known.

The text enacts this strangeness. Prefiguration is disturbing and unsettling. The dance that takes place just before Xavière harms herself prefigures the text and what Xavière is about to do. The dancer mimes a seduction scene where the woman appears to encourage then reject her suitor before falling into his arms. Xavière's behaviour with Pierre is brought to mind. In miming 'une sorcière aux gestes pleins de dangereux mystère' and 'la tête folle' of a peasant woman, the dancer seems to presage Xavière's

bouillonne, dégageant vapeurs nocives et liquides corrosifs [...]. Ces vapeurs brûlantes s'élèvent ensuite, se répandent dans l'air et finissent par retomber sur le voisinage, imprégnant les corps, contaminant les âmes. [...] Par cette atmosphère chargée de vapeurs maléfiques, des ville entières sont menacées [...]' (*Histoire de la folie*, p. 376).

⁵⁷ Poison is mentioned at other moments too. In her suffering, Françoise has the impression that 'le sang qui courait dans ses veines était empoisonné' (p. 261). As the novel culminates, Françoise feels she cannot go on living in 'cet air empoisonné' (p. 491).

crazy gesture that has such dangerous and mysterious connotations.⁵⁸ In a similar way, the Spanish poem which triggers Françoise's crisis and which is intensely symbolic, prefigures the narrative:

Même si l'on ne comprenait pas le sens des mots, on était pris aux entrailles par cet accent passionné, par ce visage que défigurait une ardeur pathétique; le poème parlait de haine et de mort, peut-être aussi d'espoir, et à travers ses sursauts et ses plaintes, c'était l'Espagne déchirée qui se faisait présente à tous les coeurs. Le feu et le sang avaient chassé des rues les guitares, les chansons, les châles éclatantes, les fleurs de nard; les maisons de danse s'étaient effondrées et les bombes avaient crevé les outres gonflées de vin; dans la chaude douceur des soirs rôdaient la peur et la faim. Les chants flamencos, la saveur des vins dont on se grisait, ce n'était plus que l'évocation funèbre d'un passé défunt. Pendant un moment, les yeux fixés sur la bouche rouge et tragique, Françoise s'abandonna aux images désolées que suscitait l'âpre incantation; elle aurait voulu se perdre corps et âme dans ces appels, dans ces regrets qui tressaillaient sous les mystérieuses sonorités.

(*L'Invitée*, pp. 262-63.)

The poem and the narrative share a significant number of motifs; hatred and death, fire and blood, regrets. Fear is prowling around though the evening is apparently mild and pleasant. Note the terms 'âpre incantation' and mystérieuses sonorités' suggestive of magic spells. A comparable effect is recreated later in the novel; Françoise has just recalled Xavière's 'sourire maniaque' when 'un long chant sanglotant perça l'épaisseur brûlante de l'air'. For Françoise, 'cette musique veule dans cette solitude torride lui paraissait l'image même de son coeur. [...] [Elle] eut envie de s'asseoir au bord du trottoir et de n'en plus bouger' (pp. 420-21).⁵⁹

The prefiguration that occurs in *L'Invitée* is all the more disturbing in that it recurs. Freud points to the sense of helplessness that is aroused by the unintended

⁵⁸ Xavière is associated with the notion 'paysanne'. When she is introduced, one of the details that is highlighted is her 'doigts rouges de paysanne' (p. 21) and, although since she came to Paris, Xavière is no longer 'paysanne' (p. 227), her hands remain 'rouges comme des mains paysannes' (p. 265).

⁵⁹ Interestingly, Paule's dance at the Christmas Eve party also prompts painful thoughts in Françoise. Paule is wearing a mask, a Gothic motif associated with Xavière, and mimes a storm, 'elle était à elle seule tout un ouragan déchaîné' (p. 193). There are strong echoes here of the image of a natural disaster applied to Xavière: 'Avec un peu d'effroi, Françoise considéra cette vivante catastrophe qui envahissait sournoisement sa vie; c'était Pierre qui par son respect, son estime avait brisé les digues où Françoise la contenait. Maintenant qu'elle était déchaînée, jusqu'où ça irait-il?' (p. 128). See also 'une tournade [...] secoua Françoise', p. 210.

recurrence of the same situation, the impression of 'something fateful and inescapable' (p. 237). He relates it to the uncanny, classing it as an instance of the phenomenon of the double. Françoise is imprisoned in her obsession and the text underlines how the same things recur time and time again:

Depuis combien de temps durait-elle cette discussion indéfinie et toujours neuve? Qu'a fait Xavière? Que fera-t-elle? Que pense-t-elle? Pourquoi? Soir après soir, l'obsession renaissait aussi harassante, aussi vaine, avec ce goût de fièvre dans la bouche, et cette désolation au coeur, et cette fatigue du corps sommeilleux. Quand les questions auraient enfin trouvé une réponse, d'autres questions, toutes pareilles, reprendraient la ronde implacable: Que veut Xavière? Que dira-t-elle? Comment? Pourquoi? Il n'y avait aucun moyen de les arrêter.

(*L'Invitée*, p. 379.)

The archetypal symbol of the circle expresses the never ending nature of the trap. It is a recurring motif; Françoise hoped she had finished with 'toutes ces interprétations, ces exégèses où Pierre pouvait tourner en rond pendant des heures...' (p. 244); reference has already been made to 'le cercle de passion et de souci' (p. 377) where Xavière's spell holds Françoise and Pierre; Françoise, shortly after this, will compare the busy 'lucid' street outside with her room which is 'engluée d'angoisse où les pensées obsédantes poursuivaient leur ronde sans trêve' (p. 388). She can see no way out: 'Des attentes, des fuites, toute l'année s'était passée ainsi. [...] Il ne restait aucun salut. On pouvait fuir, mais il faudrait bien revenir, et ce seraient d'autres attentes, et d'autres fuites, sans fin' (p. 438).

Textual parallels also produce an uncanny effect whilst adding to the intensity of the text. The text duplicates the trap where Françoise is caught, reproducing her never ending nightmare. If we take the three climatic moments in the book, the parallels are conspicuous: the use of the verb 'consumer', burning flesh and Xavière's insensibility, her ecstatic response and the sexual overtones which are connoted negatively: 'un sourire voluptueux et torturé de femme en proie au plaisir', (p. 354), 'la jouissance

maniaque', (p. 363), and the repetition of 'un sourire de folle' and the word 'maniaque'. In the final pages of the novel; the words that burn like a branding iron recall Xavière's 'branding' of herself with the 'bout embrasé de sa cigarette', and it is Françoise's heart that is consumed by 'la lave brûlante' (p. 500), recalling how her thoughts 'brûlaient comme des flammes' (p. 363).⁶⁰

Reflections in mirrors are also connected with the idea of the double. Freud discusses the figure of the double in general and the way in which meeting one's own image unexpectedly may be perceived as uncanny but he is, he admits, unable to explain this (Freud, p. 236 and p. 238). In *L'Invitée*, the three motifs, gaze, image/ reflection, and mirror, are intertwined. These quintessential Gothic motifs acquire their power in the book by force of their recurrence.

One of the sinister features of the concluding pages of *L'Invitée*, is the street light that is lent the human capacity to look. 'On avait caché le globe du réverbère sous un masque de fer noir et dentelé comme un loup vénitien. Sa lumière jaune ressemblait à un regard' (p. 500). In this symbolic space, to be seen is to give others power.⁶¹

Remember how Xavière bewitched Françoise: 'Cette sorcière s'était emparé de son image et lui faisait subir à son gré les pires envoûtements' (p. 298). Fear of being gazed upon and having her self stolen from her explains why, faced with Xavière's version of events, 'elle aurait voulu cacher sa figure' (p. 490). Françoise is clear that she must defend her 'image': 'Il y avait longtemps qu'on essayait de la lui ravir' (p. 500). Her 'image' is far more than simply her reflection. It is her self / who she is. The idea that other consciousnesses can reduce us to an image is introduced very early in the text:

⁶⁰ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick considers repetition as the temporal metaphor of doubleness p. 139. Repetition will be examined more fully in Chapter Four.

⁶¹ In his discussion of the ending of *L'Invitée*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty points out that 'once we are aware of the existence of others, we commit ourselves to being, among other things, what they think of us, since we recognize in them the exorbitant power to *see us*'. 'Metaphysics and the Novel', in *Critical Essays on Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. by Elaine Marks, Boston: Hall, 1987, pp. 31-44, p. 41.

‘C’est terrifiant: on a l’impression de ne plus être qu’une image dans la tête de quelqu’un d’autre’ (p. 18). Others act as our mirror, showing us reflections of ourselves that threaten our sense of identity. In destroying Xavière, Françoise destroys her ‘criminelle figure’ that Xavière reflects back to her.

Françoise turns away from the gaze of the street light to be met by her reflection that springs up in the mirror. (‘Son image jaillit soudain au fond du miroir’ p. 500.) This is a Gothic moment. As Françoise’s identity disintegrated, we read: ‘[elle] n’avait plus que la pâle consistance d’une image’ (p. 364), and she was reduced to a ghostly presence: ‘une vague phosphorescence qui traînait à la surface des choses, parmi des milliers et des milliers de vains feux follets’ (p. 365). Thus ‘image’ also denotes Françoise’s loss of self, loss of identity. When Françoise looks hard at her reflection (‘Elle fixa l’image’, p. 500) she claims back her self. It is a moment of reintegration. Significantly, Françoise’s earlier moment of triumph had also been marked by her looking in the mirror (p. 467).

Françoise’s defiant gesture when she stares at herself in the mirror in the culminating moments of the novel, is all the more potent in view of her noted reluctance to look at herself at all, although, it must be said, this reluctance is not completely borne out by the text where numerous examples of Françoise looking in mirrors can be found. Xavière says that Françoise never looks at herself (p. 179 repeated p.183) and Françoise agrees that she treats her face like an ‘objet étranger’. What is important is that when Françoise does look at herself she sees a blank, an absence. Her lack of a face is her lack of self, of identity. ‘Je ne suis personne, pensa Françoise. [...] elle toucha son visage: ce n’était pour elle qu’un masque blanc’ (p. 184). Pierre’s gaze could have given Françoise a shape, an identity but he is looking at Xavière, not at her, she is part of him and invisible to him. Françoise blames herself for her loss of identity: ‘Il n’y avait personne

[...] elle avait cessé d'être quelqu'un; elle n'avait même plus de figure' (p. 216).⁶² It is revealing to compare Françoise's attitude to mirrors with Xavière's. Just before Françoise is taken seriously ill and decides to go for a walk she glances at her face in the mirror: 'C'était un visage qui ne disait rien; il était collé sur le devant de la tête comme une étiquette: Françoise Miquel. Le visage de Xavière, au contraire, c'était un intarissable chuchotement, c'était sans doute pour cela qu'elle se souriait si mystérieusement dans les miroirs' (p. 215). However, note how Françoise too smiles at her reflection as she resigns herself to defeat (p. 417).

Reflections in mirrors suggest a sense of alienation and unreality. As she leaves her hospital room after weeks of confinement, Françoise's experience is compared to going through a mirror ('pénétrer à travers une glace') and 'un voyage dans l'au-delà' (p. 239-40). Once she is well again, Françoise's alienation is captured when instead of living her life, she watches what is happening in a mirror behind the bar in the café (p. 300-301). Elisabeth had a similar experience, watching the trio living their apparently happy lives in the mirror whilst she suffers in an 'enfer sordide' (p. 104).

Hell is a recurring motif in *L'Invitée* and is a further manifestation of the Gothic. The incident when Xavière harms herself terminates with an evocation of hell. It is suggestive of Dante's 'Inferno': 'On ne pourrait que tourner en rond tout autour dans une exclusion éternelle' (p. 355). Xavière's assessment of the episode that takes place shortly afterwards, when the trio are listening to the Spanish poem and when Xavière herself is in a trance like state, is ominous: 'On était au fond de l'enfer, je croyais qu'on n'en sortirait plus jamais' (p. 366). Françoise is afraid that for the trio, 'c'était un noir enfer qui les attendait' (p. 397). The depiction of Françoise's life is reminiscent of a

⁶² See also p. 348. 'Françoise se sentait par contraste lisse et nue comme ces têtes sans visage des tableaux de Chirico.'

vision of hell: 'Elle se laissait flotter passivement comme une épave, mais il y avait de noirs écueils à l'horizon; elle flottait sur un océan gris, tout autour d'elle s'étendaient des eaux bitumeuses et soufrées [...]' (p. 236). Black ('noirs' and 'bitumeuses') and sulphur suggest hell. Grey is also a motif here, suggestive of depression. This is reiterated later; in Françoise's heart 'il faisait toujours gris' (p. 418).

Françoise's living hell is reproduced in the text. One feature of this symbolic space is fire and fire and burning are motifs that appear time and time again. In the passages quoted, the poem speaks of fire and there is not only Xavière's burning flesh in the episodes in the night-club, Françoise's thoughts also 'brûlaient comme des flammes' (p. 363). As the novel culminates, the burning motif that has accumulated throughout the text reaches its crescendo: 'les larmes brûlaient ses yeux [...] les larmes brûlaient, les mots brûlaient comme un fer rouge. [...] Dans les ténèbres, le visage de Gerbert brûlait d'un feu noir, et les lettres sur le tapis étaient noires comme un pacte infernal.[...] Une lave noire et torride coulait dans ses veines' (p. 499). With the repetition a few lines later: 'Les larmes coulaient, la lave brûlante coulait et consumait le coeur' (p. 500). Françoise's experience has an hallucinatory quality. There are distinct echoes of Marlowe's *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus*, reinforced by mention of a 'pacte infernal'.⁶³ Françoise's ordeal is almost Faustian. Faustian in the sense that Françoise is now to pay the price for her black soul. She had welcomed the black and bitter hatred she felt for Xavière almost as a release (p. 445, 'délivrance' in French, which is a word with religious overtones), and when she learns that Pierre no longer values his relationship with Xavière, 'Françoise accueillit sans scandale la joie mauvaise qui

⁶³ Marlowe, Christopher, *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus*, ed. by R. G. Lunt. London: Blackie & Son, [n.d.].

envahissait son coeur; ça lui avait coûté trop cher naguère de vouloir se garder l'âme pure' (p. 466).

Pierre speaks of Xavière's self-inflicted burns as sacred and interprets her gesture as expiation: 'une brûlure sacrée', 'une brûlure expiatoire' (p. 357). This is another instance of distorted religion, the blasphemous substitution of an idolatrous diabolical creed for genuine faith.

L'Invitée is a dark book. In the final pages the predominance of the colours red and black is clear ('fer rouge', 'feu noir', 'noires comme un pacte infernal', 'lave noire'). These colours occur in the black hair and red comb and shawl of the Spanish dancer (p. 353) and 'la bouche rouge et tragique' of the Spanish woman declaiming the poem (p. 363) at the other climactic moments in the book. Due to their repeated appearances throughout *L'Invitée*, the colours red and black gather symbolic weight, adding to the doom laden, Gothic atmosphere in the text. Black is associated with hell and evil. Black and red and fire are inextricably linked. And red is also related to blood, another recurring motif. These colours recur so very frequently they are almost a constant. Often they figure in the detail of the text. Black has been mentioned in a significant number of the quotations previously made, and there are many other examples: Xavière is 'une petite perle noire' (pp. 164 and 491), the future is 'un noir tunnel' (p. 291), Pierre 'tombait dans de noirs silences' (p. 402), the water of the Seine is 'd'un noir poli' (p. 490), when Françoise knows Xavière has found Gerbert's letters her love for him is 'noir comme la trahison' and there is 'devant elle et en elle cette nuit de bitume' (p. 497). There are splashes of red throughout the book, often with sinister overtones: Élisabeth's red nail varnish leaves 'une sorte de dépôt sanglant' and her fingers are 'doigts de boucher' (p. 85); in the café where Françoise goes with Gerbert, the singer dressed up as a soldier has his face 'peinturlurée de rouge' (p. 153) and the

musicians and the life-size doll are dressed in crimson and red and black (p. 158); in Xavière's bedroom a red lampshade 'jetait dans la pièce une lueur sanglante' (p. 167); Françoise's head is filled with 'un grand tournoiement rougeâtre et piquant' (p. 192).⁶⁴

Two antithetical series of distinctively Gothic images related to the evocation of hellishness, the threat of the abyss, inform the text as a whole. They are one series of images to do with weight, immobilisation, engulfment, enclosure and suffocation and another to do with the void and emptiness. These two series are brought together as the text underlines the paradox of being engulfed by nothingness:

C'était comme la mort, une totale négation, une éternelle absence, et cependant par une contradiction bouleversante, ce gouffre de néant pouvait se rendre présent à soi-même et se faire exister pour soi avec plénitude; l'univers tout entier s'engloutissait en lui, et Françoise, à jamais dépossédée du monde, se dissolvait elle-même dans ce vide dont aucun mot, aucune image ne pouvait cerner le contour infini.

(*L'Invitée*, p. 364.)

Space has become palpable, a mass which will swallow up Françoise.

The cluster of images to do with weight that characterise the text, bring together favourite Gothic motifs. The words 'écraser' and 'lourd' are repeated very many times. Françoise experiences Xavière as a weight in her life: 'Tout prenait un tel poids quand elle était là, c'en était accablant' (p. 187). Yet it will be Xavière who releases Françoise from the prison of 'des lourdes pensées de plomb' (p. 264). Xavière is distressed by the 'weight' of her relationship with Pierre once it has been put into words: 'C'est tellement lourd maintenant; c'est comme une gangue autour de moi; elle tremblait de la tête aux pieds. C'est tellement lourd' (p. 255). She struggles against 'menaces écrasantes' (p. 255). The idea that her future will be committed to the trio fills Françoise with dread:

⁶⁴ In the dark theatre in the opening pages of the novel, the red carpet and seats stand out. The setting of the novel (many scenes take place in Parisian cafés and hotel rooms) is not at first sight Gothic (Gothic tales typically take place in medieval castles, monasteries or ruined houses) and yet readers may feel there is something Gothic in the description of Françoise walking through the dark, mysterious and seemingly labyrinthine theatre. See pp. 12-13.

‘[Elle] sentit comme une lourde chape qui s’abattait sur ses épaules [...]’ (p. 290). The words of their pact, ‘cinq ans’, are heavy. When Françoise realises that Xavière knows about her relationship with Gerbert, she falls back into an armchair, ‘écrasée par un poids mortel’ (p. 497).

Beneath this weight it is difficult to move; a group of complementary images related to immobilisation are to be found throughout *L’Invitée*. At the climactic moments in the night-club the trio are captured, as if frozen in a tableau. Xavière comes round from her trance-like state ‘comme au sortir d’un cauchemar’ only to take hold of Françoise and Pierre to take them with her ‘au fond de l’enfer’ (p. 366).

‘Brusquement, elle leur prit à chacun une main, ses paumes étaient brûlantes. Françoise frissonna au contact des doigts fiévreux qui se crispaient sur les siens; elle aurait voulu retirer sa main, détourner la tête, parler à Pierre, mais elle ne pouvait plus faire un mouvement; rivée à Xavière [...].

[...] les mains de Xavière n’avaient pas lâché leur proie, son visage figé n’exprimait rien. Pierre non plus n’avait pas bougé; on aurait cru qu’un même enchantement les avait tous trois changés en marbre.

(*L’Invitée*, pp. 364-65.)

When she is ill, Françoise is ‘paralysée entre les draps’ (p. 255). In the trio, ‘elle avait même l’impression d’être absolument ligotée’ (p. 290). Being bogged down is an idea that is found repeatedly. The weight of Xavière makes it hard for Françoise to move forward: ‘Avec Xavière les choses s’alourdissaient tout de suite: on avait l’impression de marcher dans la vie avec des kilos de terre glaise sous ses semelles’ (pp. 119-20). There are echos of this when the nightmare quality of Françoise’s life is evoked in a strange, contradictory image:

Sa vie avait perdu toute consistance, c’était une substance molle dans laquelle on croyait s’enliser à chaque pas ; et puis on rebondissait, juste assez pour aller s’engluier un peu plus loin, avec à chaque seconde l’espoir d’un engloutissement définitif, à chaque seconde l’espoir d’un sol soudain raffermi.

(*L’Invitée*, pp. 481-82.)

This recalls an earlier evocation of an oppressive afternoon when the tar on the road melted in the heat and stuck to Françoise's feet and Françoise felt she had become 'une masse fade et cotonneuse' (p. 420).

The atmosphere of *L'Invitée* is claustrophobic. The characters' world shrinks and they are shut in with their obsession, the real world is elsewhere.⁶⁵ Indeed, their obsession becomes their world, it is their prison. Images of enclosure and suffocation recur. 'Elle commençait à étouffer dans ce trio qui se refermait de plus en plus sur lui même' (p. 296). 'L'atmosphère tendue, passionnée, étouffante dans laquelle Pierre et Xavière l'enfermaient' (p. 340). There is the sense of a rich, vast world that exists outside the confines of the trio and that is evoked when Françoise remembers her past with Pierre (p. 377) or when it is a matter of the holiday with Gerbert (pp. 437 and 445-46). Or even when Françoise simply looks out of the window to see '[la] rue affairée, lucide, où toutes choses avaient un air raisonnable', before turning back to her room 'engluée d'angoisse' (p. 388).

Xavière's hotel room is the epitome of a Gothic space. The walls, 'bariolés comme une vision de fièvre' enclose unsatisfied desires, boredom and resentment that make the air unbreathable. In an extended metaphor, these feelings become the rank and poisonous vegetation in a hothouse where the air is thick with moisture and sticks to the body. It inspires fear in Françoise.

Ce n'était pas seulement un sanctuaire où Xavière célébrait son propre culte:
c'était une serre chaude où s'épanouissait une végétation luxuriante et vénéneuse,
c'était un cachot d'hallucinée dont l'atmosphère moite collait au corps.
(*L'Invitée*, p. 342.)

⁶⁵ For readers, the text is rendered more claustrophobic by the absence of historical context from the greater part of the novel. As Elizabeth Fallaize points out, the historical situation of the characters only assumes importance in the final chapter when the war, that formed the context of the actual writing of the book, becomes a reality. *The Novels*, p. 28.

The word 'cachot' linked with dankness could be suggestive of a Gothic dungeon. Be that as it may, the Gothic emphasis on suffocation and enclosure is clear.

Weight threatens to drag characters down into the abyss, into nothingness.

Witness Élisabeth: 'Sa tête était toute gonflée d'eau et de nuit; elle devenait énorme et si lourde qu'elle l'entraînait vers l'abîme: le sommeil ou la mort, ou la folie, un gouffre sans fond où elle allait se perdre à jamais' (p. 106). And Françoise: 'Des pieds à la tête elle se sentait changée en bloc de plomb; la séparation de [Pierre] était cruelle, mais rien ne saurait la faire glisser sur cette pente de mirage au bout de laquelle s'ouvrait elle ne savait quel abîme' (p. 131).

On the verge of being ill, Françoise is overwhelmed by a sense of space as the abyss at her feet expands to encompass the stars above, ('à ses pieds ce gouffre qui se creusait jusqu'aux étoiles'). Quite paradoxically, given the impression of weight and enclosure that prevails, a sense of infinity and emptiness also pervades *L'Invitée*. This is created by an accumulation of references in the text: 'infini', 'sans fin', 'vide'. These motifs figure large in the evocation of the danger threatening Françoise. 'Ce n'était aucun objet saisissable, c'était un incessant jaillissement et une fuite incessante, transparente pour soi seule et à jamais impénétrable' (p. 355). The words 'un incessant jaillissement et une fuite incessante' contribute to the effect of emptiness and infinity. 'Françoise, à jamais dépossédée du monde, se dissolvait elle-même dans ce vide dont aucun mot, aucune image ne pouvait cerner le contour infini' (p. 364). Space suggests expansion and disintegration. As Françoise chooses between her own survival and Xavière's, space and emptiness is evoked by Françoise's being alone 'dans un ciel glacé'. It is on this immense stage that Françoise fights Xavière for her existence in the final pages of *L'Invitée*. Xavière herself embodies contradiction; she excludes and encloses, is infinite expansion and pure interiority: 'elle était là, n'existant que pour soi,

tout entière réfléchie en elle-même, réduisant au néant tout ce qu'elle excluait; elle enfermait le monde entier dans sa propre solitude triomphante, elle s'épanouissait sans limites, infinie, unique' (pp. 502-3).

White and the light associated with it play a particular role in the dark symbolic landscape in *L'Invitée*. White is the colour of emptiness. Light is painful. 'Avec un éblouissement douloureux, Françoise se sentit transpercée d'une lumière aride et blanche qui ne laissait en elle aucun recoin d'espoir; un moment elle resta immobile à regarder briller dans la nuit le bout rouge de sa cigarette' (p. 180). (Note the reappearance of black and red.) 'La lumière qui l'avait pénétrée tout à l'heure ne lui avait découvert que du vide' (p. 183). White is the colour of the pain of self-knowledge: 'ce bloc de blancheur translucide et nue, aux arêtes râpeuses, c'était elle, en dépit d'elle-même, irrémédiablement (p. 312). Paradoxically, it is Françoise's emptiness that brings relief to her during her long illness. It is a light/ white/ silent space in the book. Françoise is calm in this vast space out of time. (See pp. 222-23.)⁶⁶

In *L'Invitée* there is a Gothic emphasis on death, tombs, mummies and ghosts, all motifs related to the uncanny (Freud, p. 24). There is a constant stream of explicit references to death. For example, during the climactic moments in the night-club, death is mentioned four times in the space of twenty-five lines: 'le poème parlait de haine et de mort', 'ce n'était plus que l'évocation funèbre d'un passé défunt', 'le scandale éclatait, aussi monstrueux, aussi définitif que la mort', 'c'était comme la mort' (pp. 363-64). Tombs also feature prominently and they are, of course, an archetypal instance of enclosure. Françoise describes Pierre's love for her as 'comme les sépulcres blanchis de

⁶⁶ The motifs of silence, emptiness, timelessness and calm underlined there are picked up and foregrounded again in the final pages of the book: 'Soudain un grand calme descendit en Françoise. Le temps venait de s'arrêter. Françoise était seule dans un ciel glacé. C'était une solitude si solennelle et si définitive qu'elle ressemblait à la mort' (p. 501). Freud mentions but does not explicate the uncanny effect of dark, silence and solitude. (Freud, 'The Uncanny', p. 246.) I am content here simply to point out the extent to which these motifs predominate in the final pages of *L'Invitée*.

l'Évangile, ça flamboie à l'extérieur, c'est solide, c'est fidèle, on peut même périodiquement les recrépir avec de belles paroles' (p. 199), but they contain nothing but ash and dust⁶⁷ and she describes his feelings as 'des momies', 'tout embaumé' (p. 200).⁶⁸ Combining the motifs of death and weight, we find the image of their love as an old corpse that they drag around with them ('un vieux cadavre que nous traînons avec nous' p. 202). The light in Xavière's hotel room is 'funèbre' (p. 168). The flat that Françoise and Xavière share, is repeatedly referred to as a tomb: 'les vitres bleus [...] semblaient défendre un tombeau' (p. 484), 'la lumière mortuaire' (p. 490), 'catafalque' (p. 491). In a nice Gothic touch, as Françoise runs to her secret rendez-vous with Gerbert, 'derrière le mur du cimetière, une chouette hulula' (p. 484).

A related series of images focuses on hidden decay. Shiny surfaces hide inner decomposition/ corruption/ disintegration. The image is first introduced in connection with actresses that Françoise and Élisabeth are discussing :

Les corps étaient jeunes [...] mais cette jeunesse n'avait pas la fraîcheur des choses vivantes, c'était une jeunesse embaumée; ni ride, ni patte d'oie ne marquait les chairs bien massées ; cet air usé autour des yeux n'en était que plus inquiétant. Ça vieillissait par en dessous; ça pourrait vieillir encore longtemps sans que craquât la carapace bien lustrée et puis, un jour, d'un seul coup, cette coque brillante devenue mince comme un papier de soie tomberait en poussière; alors on verrait apparaître une vieille parfaitement achevée [...].

(*L'Invitée*, pp. 175-76.)

This image has a number of affinities with the Gothic; the intimation of the living dead, the fact that the decay is hidden, the animal associations, the idea that the shell will one day crumble into dust without warning. It is an uncomfortable image.⁶⁹ Parallel images are applied to Françoise and Pierre's relationship:

⁶⁷ 'Ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.' Matthew 23. 27.

⁶⁸ There are echoes of this image in Xavière's outburst after the outbreak of war: 'Ça ne me suffit pas de contempler les événements du fond d'un sépulcre!' (p. 483).

⁶⁹ A connection is made with 'des conserves de homard' and readers' unease increases when textual echoes establish a link between this image and Françoise's eating shellfish. It is another telling detail reinforcing suggestions of cannibalism, p. 292.

Ils avaient édifié de belles constructions impeccables et ils s'abritaient à leur ombre, sans plus s'inquiéter de ce qu'elles pourraient bien contenir. [...] sans perdre sa forme parfaite, leur amour, leur vie se vidait lentement de sa substance; comme ces grandes chenilles à la coque invulnérable mais qui portent dans leur chair molle de minuscules vermisseaux qui les récurent avec soin.

(*L'Invitée*, pp. 193-94.)

Again, there is the disturbing allusion to hidden decomposition combined with the repellant image of worms eating away at living flesh.

The text inscribes the body. The body in this symbolic landscape is a site of pain rather than pleasure. Françoise conforms to the role of Gothic heroine and is taken ill and takes to her bed. Her illness is described in terms of Gothic excess. Françoise's mental pain is translated into physical suffering. This is true during her illness of course, but it is also the case before and after her illness. Images that evoke her illness are echoed elsewhere in the text, showing the extent to which Françoise's mental and physical suffering become conflated. The images are violent ones of tearing, burning, biting and stabbing. They are Gothic in their hyperbole.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Illness:

- 'Elle frissonna; elle devait avoir la fièvre, ses mains étaient moites et tout son corps brûlait.' (p. 211.)
- (After the rendition of the poem in the night-club, when Xavière takes hold of Françoise's hand 'ses paumes étaient brûlantes' and Françoise 'frissonna au contact des doigts fiévreux' (p. 364).)
- 'Une douleur lancinante lui coupa le souffle; elle s'arrêta et porta les mains à ses côtes [...] Un grand frisson la secoua de la tête aux pieds; elle était en sueur, sa tête bourdonnait [...]' (p. 217.)
- 'Une bouffée de sang lui brûla le visage et son coeur se mit à battre avec violence [...]' (p. 218.)
- 'des ondes brûlantes la parcoururent' (p. 218.)
- 'une douleur aiguë lui déchira la poitrine' (p. 219.)
- 'le sol fuyait en tourbillon sous ses pieds, ça lui donnait la nausée. [...] la sueur perlait à grosses gouttes sur son front' (p. 240.)
- 'sa tête était vide et lourde' (p. 240.)
- 'elle gisait paralysée entre les draps' (p. 255.)
- 'Françoise avait l'impression que tout son corps allait se dissoudre en sueur.' (p. 246.)

Elsewhere:

- 'une souffrance aiguë la déchira' (p. 166.)
- 'Sa tête bourdonnait; il lui semblait que quelque chose en elle, une artère ou ses côtes ou son coeur, allait éclater.' (p. 196.)
- 'mille images douloureuses tourbillonnaient dans sa tête et lui déchiraient le coeur (p. 261.)
- After witnessing Xavière's self-harm, Françoise is paralysed by 'l'angoisse' (p. 356.)
- 'ce goût de fièvre dans la bouche' (p. 379.)
- 'sa gorge brûlait' (p. 383.)
- 'Il se fit en Françoise un déchirement si aigu qu'un cri lui monta aux lèvres, elle serra les dents mais les larmes jaillirent. (p. 433.)
- 'le remords la déchira [...] Elle avait mal à la tête et ses yeux brûlaient.' (p. 435.)
- 'une morsure au coeur' (p. 488.) (pp. 260, 373, et al.)

References to the throat and heart reverberate in the text. Commonly these references are to do with tightness and express Françoise's deep upset. 'Son coeur restait serré de souffrances et de colère' (p. 295). 'Elle ne voulait pas sentir à nouveau un étau lui serrer la gorge' (p. 437). These dead metaphors, 'le coeur serré' and 'la gorge serrée' recur throughout *L'Invitée* at least fifteen and twelve times each respectively, almost like a refrain.⁷¹ The text returns almost obsessively to these motifs which gain symbolic weight. They are consonant with images of enclosure. Furthermore, they form only part of the dense web of references to the heart and throat which become veritable leitmotifs in the text.

We have already noted the importance of blood in Simone de Beauvoir's symbolic landscape. It is mentioned directly more than thirteen times, generally in connection with upset, draining from or rushing to Françoise's face. Sweat is also a natural feature when emphasis is placed on burning and airlessness. Tears are shed with almost monotonous regularity; sobbing intersperses the text. The body is messy, a leaky vessel.

Sexuality in *L'Invitée* is distorted in true Gothic fashion. Sex is generally connoted negatively. Distaste is evinced even in small details in the text; when she is comforting Éloy, Françoise feels 'un peu de repugnance pour ce gros petit corps si souvent trituré et toujours intact' (p. 197). As Elizabeth Fallaize demonstrates, Xavière's sexuality is foregrounded in the text.⁷² Xavière's behaviour in the night-club when she deliberately harms herself, suggests a mad, masochistic sexuality; 'un sourire

'Son visage brûlait. (p. 494.)

'Tout son corps bourdonnait. Elle sentait son coeur entre ses côtes, sous son crâne, au bout de ses doigts. (p. 496.)

⁷¹ Examples: 'le coeur serré', pp. 13, 20, 31, 36, 146, 156, 178, 295, 335, 339, 343, 427, 470; 'la gorge serrée', pp. 37, 54, 78, 126, 143, 161, 173, 260, 316, 430, 437, 472.

⁷² Fallaize, *The Novels*, pp. 30-33. Xavière's ambivalence to sexuality is related to the portrait of adolescent sexuality in 'Le Deuxième Sexe'. See also *Moi*, Simone de Beauvoir, p. 113.

voluptueux et torturé de femme en proie au plaisir', 'les lèvres arrondies dans une moue coquette' (p. 354), 'plongée dans une extase hystérique', 'la jouissance maniaque' (p. 363).⁷³ The act of burning itself is described in sexual terms, according to a heterosexual image of desire, as the open wound is exposed to receive the burning end of the cigarette.⁷⁴ In a more minor key, Élisabeth's sexuality is also linked with self harm. She relives the sexual arousal that in the past had led her to take back her lover Claude and to stop herself repeating this pattern 'Élisabeth porta vivement la main à sa bouche et mordit son poignet' (p. 85). Sex is depicted as animal, as opposed to human. Élisabeth will not be 'had' in the same way this time, she is not 'a bitch on heat', 'une femelle'. Her sexual liaison with Guimot is depicted negatively; during their lovemaking 'une humiliation brûlante la dévorait' and she simply wants it to be over (p. 110). Françoise is horrified to think she may be a woman like Élisabeth, 'une femme qui prend' (p. 454). In relation to Xavière, Françoise is horrified at the idea that Pierre will make love with her ('Pierre en ferait une femme pâmée' p. 260), feeling that to think of Xavière as 'une femme sexuée' is sacrilegious. The language used to describe Françoise's feelings is laden with depreciatory overtones: 'Elle apercevait clairement chaque étape de ce chemin fatal qui mène des baisers aux caresses, des caresses aux derniers abandons; par la faute de Pierre, Xavière allait y rouler comme n'importe qui' (p. 260).

The erotic and incestuous tendencies of Gothic texts have been well documented. Françoise has clear maternal feelings towards Xavière and Xavière is repeatedly referred to as a child. For example, Françoise responds tenderly to Xavière

⁷³ Xavière inflicts pain on herself. In her dissociated state she feels no pain: 'Xavière ne semblait pas souffrir de sa brûlure' (p. 356). Later she says: 'Jamais je n'aurais cru que ça puisse faire si mal.' (p. 399).

⁷⁴ This is one more example of Xavière revealing something that should have remained hidden. A point made but not developed by Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, p. 116.

who shows concern for her: 'Ce n'était qu'une petite fille aimante et désarmée' (p. 48). Françoise calls her moods 'des boutades de petite fille' (p. 66), and she loses her adoptive 'petite fille soyeuse et dorée' to Pierre (p. 252).⁷⁵ These maternal feelings are overlain with sexual, and thus quasi-incestuous desire.⁷⁶ The ambiguity about their relationship that Xavière promotes, and with which Françoise willingly colludes, is also fostered by the text. Xavière liked Françoise and herself to be taken for a couple and Françoise enjoyed being linked with Xavière in this way, 'il lui semblait qu'on les isolait ensemble du reste du monde et qu'on les enfermait dans un tête-à-tête passionné' (p. 309).⁷⁷ When they dance together on this occasion, Xavière holds Françoise closer than usual. Françoise's response is far from maternal:

Elle sentait contre sa poitrine les beaux seins tièdes de Xavière, elle respirait son haleine charmante; était-ce du désir? Mais que désirait-elle? Ses lèvres contre ses lèvres? Ce corps abandonné entre ses bras? Elle ne pouvait rien imaginer, ce n'était qu'un besoin confus de garder tourné vers elle à jamais ce visage d'amoureuse et de pouvoir dire passionnément: elle est à moi.

(*L'Invitée* p. 310.)

Françoise's physical response to Xavière and her desire to possess her have unmistakable lesbian overtones. Back in Xavière's room Françoise continues to be unsettled by the physical closeness of Xavière. She is afraid that Xavière is 'hors d'atteinte' and although she wants to break into Xavière's solitude ('forcer l'accès'), she is paralysed by 'la grâce intimidant de ce beau corps qu'elle ne savait pas désirer' (p. 315). On impulse, as she is leaving Xavière, Françoise takes her into her arms. 'Xavière s'abandonna, un instant elle resta contre son épaule, immobile et souple' (p. 316). Again Françoise wonders what Xavière expects of her: 'Que Françoise la laissât aller ou

⁷⁵ Elizabeth Fallaize's reading of the trio as a 'pseudo-oedipal triangle' is pertinent here. *The Novels*, pp. 29-30.

⁷⁶ Jane Heath examines the relationship between Pierre and Xavière as both paternal and sexual, pp. 36-37. She also identifies maternal and lesbian feelings in Françoise's relationship with Xavière, pp. 37-41.

⁷⁷ I in no way wish to suggest that lesbianism is a distorted form of sexuality. It is only in relation to the heterosexual norms of the text that it should be viewed as such.

qu'elle la serrât plus fort?'.⁷⁸ Françoise lets Xavière go and goes back to her own room, ashamed of her 'tendresse inutile'. I have examined this incident at length as it is of central importance in considering the sexual nature of Françoise's feelings for Xavière; here her desire is explicit. However, it is not a lone incidence of Françoise's sexual response to Xavière. It fits into a matrix of more ambiguous allusions, allusions which occur from very early on in the text. Lesbian overtones gather momentum in Part One, Chapter Two. References to Xavière's 'tête de garçonnet' and the 'visage de jeune femme qui avait charmé Françoise' (p. 24), at first seemingly neutral, accrue resonances. As the chapter proceeds, the text dwells on the number of times Françoise touches Xavière (touching is rather rare in *L'Invitée*): 'elle effleura le poignet de Xavière' (p. 39), 'elle posa la main sur l'épaule de Xavière' (p. 44), 'sa main quitta l'épaule de Xavière et glissa le long de son bras' (p. 44), 'elle caressa la main chaude qui reposait avec confiance dans sa main' (p. 45). The chapter culminates in a scene redolent of romantic, physical love:

[Xavière] se laissa aller de tout son poids contre l'épaule de Françoise; un long moment elles demeurèrent immobiles, appuyées l'une contre l'autre; les cheveux de Xavière frôlaient la joue de Françoise; leurs doigts restaient emmêlés.

"Je suis triste de vous quitter", dit Françoise.

"Moi aussi", dit Xavière tout bas.

"Ma petite Xavière", murmura Françoise; Xavière la regardait, les yeux brillants, les lèvres entrouvertes; fondante, abandonnée, elle lui était tout entière livrée.

C'était Françoise désormais qui l'emporterait à travers la vie.

"Je la rendrai heureuse", décida-t-elle avec conviction.

(*L'Invitée*, p. 45.)⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Before they go into the bar, Françoise wonders if Xavière had been referring to her lack of physical tenderness when she said she hated purity. The sexual diction is clear: 'ne savait-elle [Françoise] donc être tendre qu'avec des mots alors qu'il y avait cette main veloutée dans sa main et ces cheveux parfumés qui frôlaient sa joue? Était-ce cela, sa maladroite pureté?' (p. 309). See also p. 303 where Françoise and Xavière hold hands.

⁷⁹ See also pp. 219, 263-65, 398 for romantic, sexual love scenes. Sexual and maternal feelings are blended on p. 263. See also p. 79. Françoise's physical/ sexual response to Xavière is condensed into her awareness of her hands; in addition to quotations already made, see p. 260 'ses mains caressantes d'homme', and p. 265 'douces mains de femme, rouges comme des mains de paysanne'.

Françoise's desire to possess Xavière completely, expressed in this early chapter for the first time (pp. 23, 40), becomes a constant in the book. Françoise wants 'une union totale' with Xavière (p. 398).⁸⁰ A close reading of the text supports the view that Françoise's jealousy is more directed at Pierre for his relationship with Xavière, than it is directed at Xavière for taking Pierre from her. Françoise's jealousy is physical: 'Elle n'avait aucune prise sur cette petite âme butée ni même sur le beau corps de chair qui la défendait; un corps tiède et souple, accessible à des mains d'homme mais qui se dressait devant Françoise comme une armure rigide' (p. 300). The suggestion is that physical domination would be a means to the spiritual domination that Françoise desires. When Pierre tells Françoise that Xavière has spent the early hours of the morning in his arms, Françoise's reaction is telling: 'Ça lui était toujours douloureux que Pierre pût étreindre ce corps dont elle n'eût même su accueillir le don' (p. 373).

In many ways, Françoise's relationship with Gerbert stands out in the narrative as something quite exceptional, something innocent and pure and healthy, 'légère et tendre comme le vent du matin sur les prairies humides' (p. 500), although even this relationship can be reread as a 'sordide trahison' (p. 500). Moreover, the diction of the seduction scene is remarkably similar to that used in connection with Françoise's pain and suffering in the trio: 'Françoise sentit un vide nauséux se creuser en elle' (p. 446); 'un désir étouffant' (p. 446); 'elle allait rêver, regretter et souffrir vainement' (p. 447); 'il s'était fait en elle une explosion de lumière si violente qu'elle craignait qu'elle ne fut visible du dehors. [...] cette joie indécente qui venait d'éclater en elle' (p. 451); 'Elle n'avait plus aucune idée en tête, seulement cette dure consigne qui lui barrait l'estomac. [...] Elle n'avait plus qu'une envie, c'était de se délivrer de cette obsession. [...] Son

⁸⁰ See also p.186: 'Si je pouvais l'avoir à moi, je l'aimerais'.

coeur battait à tout rompre' (p. 456).⁸¹ Interestingly, Françoise's feelings for Gerbert are tinged with incest too: 'C'était indéniable, elle avait des sentiments maternels pour Gerbert; maternels, avec une discrète nuance incestueuse' (p. 51-2).⁸²

Just as in the Gothic tradition, uncertainties to do with sexuality are linked to wider threats of disintegration, so in *L'Invitée*, the turmoil in the trio's lives is related to the turmoil in the wider context, to the Second World War.⁸³ Françoise's feelings are explicitly placed on a par with international tensions: 'Tout était devenu si compliqué maintenant, les sentiments, la vie, l'Europe' (p. 236). In a metaphor reminiscent of war, Françoise is drifting like a wreck at sea and on the horizon are black reefs/ dangers ('de noirs écueils') (p. 236). At an earlier point in the narrative, Françoise equated the effect Xavière would have on her future with the outbreak of war, taking advantage of ambiguity/ Pierre's misunderstanding ('cette équivoque') to seemingly talk about one whilst actually talking about the other (pp. 291-92). The most powerful images of war occur in Part Two, Chapter Three where Gerbert is the focalizer. These images have much in common with imagery attached to Françoise's emotional distress. In the following example, the animalisation of a hidden danger echoes imagery linked with Xavière and other motifs, funeral, engulfment, black, sticky, weight, exploding light, are ones that resonate throughout the text:

[La guerre] était là, en effet, tapie entre le poêle ronflant et le comptoir de zinc aux reflets jaunes, et ce repas était une agape mortuaire. Des casques, des tanks, des uniformes, des camions vert-de-gris, une immense marée boueuse déferlaient sur le monde; la terre était submergée par cette glu noirâtre où l'on s'enlisait, avec sur les épaules des vêtements de plomb à l'odeur de chien mouillé, tandis que des lueurs sinistres éclataient au ciel.

⁸¹ See p. 435- 36: 'elle la reconnaissait cette dure barre de fer qui lui coupait l'estomac'.

⁸² Toril Moi's discussion of Françoise and Gerbert's first kiss is pertinent here. She argues that Françoise is unintentionally cast as a maternal figure in relation to Gerbert when she offers her lips for a kiss and tells him 'Eh bien, faites-le, stupide petit Gerbert' (p. 460). *Simone de Beauvoir*, p. 141. Whether or not this is unintentional, it reinforces the incestuous undercurrent.

⁸³ The poem that prefigures the text, evokes Spain torn apart by war (p. 363). Elizabeth Fallaize offers an interesting reading of the history of the trio and Françoise's growing frustration, that ends in murder, as an expression of the gathering sense of doom of 1937-39, and the imminent destruction. *The Novels*, p. 28.

War is 'une pluie grise [qui] allait s'abattre sur l'Europe', drowning everything, including the bright lights of Montparnasse, 'les arcs-en-ciel de lumière' (p. 335), matching the way Xavière cast Françoise's life in shadow. When Françoise discovers that Xavière knows about her relationship with Gerbert, the metaphor expressing her reaction could so easily be a depiction of the war that frames these final scenes. The affinities are conspicuous: 'Une nuit âcre et brûlante venait de s'abattre sur le monde' (p. 497).

It is not unusual for Gothic tales to parody the convention they embody. In *L'Invitée* the Gothic economy of the text is undermined by parody of the Gothic. This parody increases readers' discomfort. They accept the values of the text and the frame it provides, only to find these thrown into question. Parody places an ambiguity at the heart of the text. Simone de Beauvoir was well aware of the ambiguity produced by the shift in narrative focus/ focalization, from Françoise to Élisabeth: 'l'expérience que Françoise vivait sur un plan tragique, on pouvait aussi en sourire' (*La Force de l'âge*, p. 349).⁸⁴ I should like to suggest that shifts in focalization are not the only way in which humour is generated in *L'Invitée*. Specifically, parody of Gothic conventions introduces a comic element with its concomitant ambiguity. The point at which the text tips over into parody is sometimes difficult to gauge, it can be no more than a slight shift in tone or nuance that makes the difference between what is expected within a Gothic economy and exaggeration. For example, Élisabeth's murderous fantasy slips into parody, partly because of the skull and crossbones on the bottle of poison and partly because of the dramatic syntax and the use of enumeration: 'La nuit se fit dans la salle; une image

⁸⁴ In fact, despite a number of humorous remarks, the chapters focalized through Élisabeth do not generally provide a comical vision of the trio. This is more the case as regards the chapter focalized through Gerbert.

traversa Élisabeth, un revolver, un poignard, un flacon avec une tête de mort; tuer.

Claude? Suzanne? Moi-même? Peu importait, ce sombre désir de meurtre gonflait

puissamment le coeur' (p. 94). The discrepancy between heightened tone and mundane

subject pushes the description of Xavière's room over the dividing line. We can only

smile at Françoise and Pierre's hyperbolic reaction to Xavière's packing:

Ils restèrent cloués sur place.

—Qu'est-ce que vous faites là dit Pierre.

La gorge de Xavière se gonfla.

—Je déménage, dit-elle d'un ton tragique. Le spectacle était atterrant. [...] tout semblait futile au prix du cataclysme qui dévastait la chambre et le visage de Xavière. Trois valises béaient au milieu de la pièce; les placards avaient dégorgé sur le sol des monceaux de vêtements fripés, de papiers, d'objets de toilette.

—Et vous comptez avoir fini bientôt? dit Pierre qui regardait avec sévérité le sanctuaire saccagé.

—Je n'en viendrai jamais à bout! dit Xavière; elle se laissa tomber sur un fauteuil et serra ses tempes entre ses doigts. Cette sorcière...

(*L'Invitée*, pp. 117-18.)

As in the first example, there are a striking number of Gothic elements in these lines, too many perhaps. Elements that elsewhere contribute to the impression of awfulness, in the full Gothic sense of the word, conveyed by the text, are here used to comic effect. A similar effect is produced when a 'choucroute' is termed 'une communion mystique' (p. 228). Also at this point in the text, suspense is built up only to end in bathos.⁸⁵ It is to Gerbert's focalization that we owe the parodic vision of Pierre and Françoise 'penchés sur Pagès comme deux démons tentateurs' (p. 320). The notion of demoniacal presence that is treated as sinister and threatening elsewhere in *L'Invitée* is comical here and Gerbert had to make an 'heroic' effort not to burst out laughing. Does the text also drift into parody when Françoise wards off misfortune ('le malheur') by taking off her nail varnish (p. 381)?

⁸⁵ See also p. 402: 'Elle l'aimait [Pierre] et pour sauver Xavière avec qui aucun amour n'était possible, elle se dressait devant lui comme une étrangère; peut-être demain deviendrait-il son ennemi. Il allait souffrir, se venger, haïr, sans elle, et même malgré elle; elle le rejetait dans sa solitude, elle qui n'avait jamais souhaité que d'être unie'. This is a borderline case. The hyperbole, dramatic syntax, diction and enumeration combine to cast its status in doubt.

The Gothic informs *L'Invitée* to a great extent. A dense web of images, words and motifs build to the final crescendo when Françoise decides to take Xavière's life. Simone de Beauvoir had recourse to the Gothic in order to express what Jung refers to as 'the shadow side of our personalities'.⁸⁶ Simone de Beauvoir tells us in *La Force de l'âge* that writing the final scenes of *L'Invitée* was a truly cathartic experience for her:

Il m'était indispensable de m'arrêter à ce dénouement: il a eu pour moi une valeur cathartique. [...] Il me fallait aller au bout de mon fantasme, lui donner corps sans en rien atténuer, si je voulais conquérir pour mon compte la solitude où je précipitai Françoise. Et en effet, l'identification s'opéra. Relisant les pages finales, aujourd'hui figées, inertes, j'ai peine à croire qu'en les rédigeant j'avais la gorge nouée comme j'avais vraiment chargé mes épaules d'un assassinat. Pourtant c'est ainsi. Stylo en main, je fis avec une sorte de terreur l'expérience de la séparation. Le meurtre de Xavière peut paraître la résolution hâtive et maladroite d'un drame que je ne savais pas terminer. Il a été au contraire le moteur et la raison d'être du roman tout entier.

(*La Force de l'âge* p. 348-9.)

The Gothic diction Simone de Beauvoir uses here is striking. The Gothic symbolic universe she created provided her with the ideal location for her confrontation with madness and pain. Her writing invites readers to feel, prompting empathy and identification as opposed to analysis. As Elizabeth MacAndrew puts it, the Gothic makes readers experience ideas.⁸⁷ In *L'Invitée* the philosophical veneer is no more than that, a veneer placed there in an attempt to justify the unjustifiable. Simone de Beauvoir (our implied author) together with her *alter ego*, Françoise, can be read as a perfect nineteenth century Gothic subject, an embodiment of Botting's definition: 'Gothic subjects were [...] no longer in control of [their] passions, desires and fantasies [...]. Excess emanated from within, from hidden, pathological motivations that rationality was powerless to control.'⁸⁸ *L'Invitée* functions as a Gothic text, providing a structure to contain the threats to rational and humanist values that it explores.

⁸⁶ Jung, Carl G., 'Approaching the Unconscious', in *Man and His Symbols* by Jung, Carl G. and M.-L. von Franz, Joseph L. Henderson et al., New York: Dell Publishing, repr. 1979, p. 51.

⁸⁷ MacAndrew, p. ix.

⁸⁸ Botting, p. 12.

Chapter Two

Continuities in Change:

Imagery in *L'Invitée*, *Les Belles Images* and *La Femme rompue*

In this chapter I want to examine Simone de Beauvoir's use of imagery in her first published novel and in her later fiction, tracing connections and developments in the images themselves and in the way they are used. I want to examine how far what I identified as the Gothic economy of *L'Invitée* can be seen to persist in the imagery of the later fiction, texts of a different tone, that are generally perceived to be quite different from her earlier fiction.¹ Notwithstanding the evident differences between the early and late fiction, Toril Moi has asserted that by 1949 'Simone de Beauvoir had truly become Simone de Beauvoir' and that her 'repertoire of themes and obsessions' was largely established.² It will be interesting to assess to what extent this is borne out by a study of imagery.

A close and comprehensive examination of Simone de Beauvoir's imagery is important for a number of reasons. It is a sound basis for an appreciation of her fiction as fiction, of the richness of her texts as literary works. Images encapsulate and add to our understanding of the themes of the texts, not necessarily in ways that Simone de Beauvoir anticipated.³ Moreover, networks of images contribute to the tone of the texts. Specifically, they mediate the madness in the texts; they are an expression of pain and fear and a nostalgic evocation of something lost. Obsessive imagery structures an obsessive situation.

¹ Elizabeth Fallaize makes the point that *Les Belles images* was received as a radical departure from Simone de Beauvoir's earlier fiction: *The Novels*, p. 118. She discusses the changes that have occurred in Simone de Beauvoir's narrative strategies since *Les Mandarins*. See also Brosman, p. 86.

² Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, p. 6.

³ Toril Moi's reading of the imagery in *L'Invitée* reveals the unconscious at work in Simone de Beauvoir's figurative language. *Simone de Beauvoir*, Chapter 4.

Little critical attention has been paid to this aspect of Simone de Beauvoir's fiction. To my knowledge no comprehensive survey of her imagery has been undertaken, although certain aspects of it have been examined. Toril Moi analyses the imagery in *L'Invitée* surrounding Xavière to support her fascinating psychoanalytical reading of the text as a 'family romance' in which Xavière plays the role of mother/monster.⁴ Phil Powrie looks at the imagery in *La Femme rompue*, arguing that the images of vision that he identifies, 'form the metaphoric fabric of the failure to achieve an authentic mode of self-expression'.⁵ He also considers Gothic images of entombment which he links to women writers' 'possible sense of entrapment within a male tradition' (p. 328). It is an interesting argument and I agree that elements in *La Femme rompue* are Gothic but find no textual evidence to support his assertion that 'clarity, purity and freedom are all associated with the male, [...] whereas women are associated with opacity: the opacity of vision but also the opacity of the body, sexuality, entombment' (p. 328). This opposition is not drawn along gender distinctions in *La Femme rompue*.⁶ His suggestion that images of the sky/ clarity of vision are associated with 'a vanished golden age' is more helpful but, as Phil Powrie himself demonstrates, light is not always connoted positively in Simone de Beauvoir's texts.⁷

One of the difficulties involved in organising a review of the imagery in *L'Invitée*, *Les Belles Images* and *La Femme rompue* is the need to impose a linear progression on a mass of material that itself does not progress in this fashion, indeed a

⁴ Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, p. 110-21.

⁵ Powrie, Phil, 'Rereading Between The Lines: A Postscript on *La Femme rompue*', *Modern Language Review*, 87 (1992), 320-29 (p. 325).

⁶ His argument appears to rely principally on his analysis of 'Monologue'. He holds that Murielle associates the purity of the moon with her father, yet the quotations he gives to support his argument do not bear this out. See p. 326 of his article.

⁷ Other studies that give some consideration to Simone de Beauvoir's imagery include Anne Ophir's readings of *La Femme rompue* in *Regards féminins*, pp. 17-87 and Françoise Arnaud Hibbs' study: *L'Espace dans les romans de Simone de Beauvoir: son expression et sa fonction*.

mass of material that resists such a sequential development. The material is made up of clusters of images that overlap and intersect. Although a particular cluster of images might usefully be placed alongside and discussed in relation to a number of other clusters of images, in a succession of images, it must inevitably be placed between just two other clusters of images.⁸ In Simone de Beauvoir's texts, the different clusters of images form a dense and complex web, rich in resonances. The aim of this study is to trace a pattern in the rich network of images she creates to mediate madness.

Françoise, Laurence, the unnamed woman protagonist in 'L'Age de discrétion', Murielle and Monique all experience breakdown and loss of self and are brought face to face with madness. Françoise's madness is underplayed in the text of *L'Invitée*.⁹ Nevertheless, she struggles with threats to her stability/ identity in a claustrophobic atmosphere and closed rooms. In the later fiction too, the woman protagonists confront the pain of loss and abandonment in closed rooms. Françoise, for example, coping with intense fears and anxiety provoked by Xavière's extreme reaction to having made love with Gerbert, feels cut off from the apparent normality represented by the busy street she sees from her window and trapped in her room 'engluée d'angoisse où les pensées obsédantes poursuivaient leur ronde sans trêve' (p. 388).¹⁰ A claustrophobic atmosphere pervades *L'Invitée*. In *Les Belles Images*, Laurence's crisis reaches its climax in a closed room. On her return from Greece, defeated over Catherine and deeply disappointed by the reconciliation of her parents, Laurence retreats to her room to contend with her pain: 'J'ai tiré les rideaux. Couchée, les yeux fermés, je récapitulerai ce voyage [...]' (p. 153). In 'L'Age de discrétion', during André's absence, isolated in her flat ('le téléphone aux abonnés absents' p. 62), the woman, admittedly to a lesser degree of intensity, faces up

⁸ Cross references between clusters of images will be given where appropriate.

⁹ This will be discussed in greater depth in a subsequent chapter.

¹⁰ The symbolism of closed rooms is related to Xavière too (see my Chapter One). The terms 'cloîtrer' and 'se terror' used in connection with Xavière are also applied to Monique. See below.

to her disappointment and disillusionment, goes over the life she has shared with André and looks for answers to the questions that preoccupy her. She too shuts out the light: 'Je suis donc restée chez moi, à ruminer. Il faisait très chaud; même si j'abaissais les stores, j'étouffais. [...] Il fallait récapituler notre histoire. [...] J'ai arrêté. Ce qu'il fallait, c'était réfléchir. [...]' (pp. 64-65). Murielle's crisis, her monologue, takes place on New Year's Eve in her lonely flat behind closed curtains, her telephone silenced (p. 87). She goes over her abandonment and her daughter's suicide, defending herself against the accusing, mocking voices she hears in her head. In 'La Femme rompue', when Maurice goes on a skiing trip with Noëlle, Monique shuts herself away in her flat: 'Je me suis cloîtrée. [...] J'ai choisi de me terrer dans mon caveau' (p. 221). During these two weeks when she stops eating and washing, abuses alcohol and drugs, Monique goes over what she has written in her diary, traces her relationship and break up with Maurice and faces the pain of disillusionment.

It would be wrong to suggest that the crises of the women protagonists in the later fiction are restricted to these episodes in closed rooms. However, it can be argued that their breakdowns do reach a climax/ turning point at these moments. Murielle is perhaps the only exception as she appears permanently trapped in her delusions. The unmistakable symbolism of closed rooms/ spaces has attracted critical attention. It is hard to disagree with Françoise Hibbs' view that 'tout au long des romans beauvoiriens nous retrouvons le thème de la folie qui menace l'être enfermé dans un espace clos, enfermé sur lui-même'.¹¹ It seems clear that these spaces are related to the unconscious. However, I cannot agree that these spaces represent 'des pièges où la tentation de se replier sur soi-même pèse comme une menace: menace d'asphyxie de la conscience

¹¹ Hibbs, p. 47.

dans le narcissisme, la passivité, la folie ou la mort'.¹² Rather, I read these spaces as the figuration of a confrontation with repressed feelings; they are spaces where women are brought face to face with feelings that have been denied and ignored, spaces where they are brought to address questions of self and identity. Thus, for me, enclosed spaces are sites of possible transformation.¹³

Powerful imagery in Simone de Beauvoir's fiction communicates the women protagonists' experience of the threat of madness. There is an important cluster of images related to the void and nothingness. Related images of falling are frequent. These were key motifs in *L'Invitée*. For example, during Françoise's walk in Montmartre:

[Françoise] se sentit envahie d'un ennui si mortel qu'elle eut les jambes coupées. Qu'est-ce que ça pouvait pour elle toutes ces choses étrangères? C'était posé, à distance, ça n'effleurait même pas ce vide vertigineux dans lequel elle était happée. Un maëlstrom. On descendait en spirale de plus en plus profondément, il semblait qu'à la fin on allait toucher quelque chose: le calme, ou le désespoir, n'importe quoi de décisif; mais on restait toujours à la même hauteur, au bord du vide.

(*L'Invitée*, p.216.)

The threat that Xavière represents to Françoise is evoked in a related image:

C'était comme la mort, une totale négation, une éternelle absence, et cependant par une contradiction bouleversante, ce gouffre de néant pouvait se rendre présent à soi-même et se faire exister pour soi avec plénitude; l'univers tout entier s'engloutissait en lui, et Françoise, à jamais dépossédée du monde, se dissolvait elle-même dans ce vide dont aucun mot, aucune image ne pouvait cerner le contour infini.

(*L'Invitée*, p. 364.)

¹² Hibbs, p. 48. (In connection with the idea of the threat represented by closed spaces, Françoise Hibbs suggests that in *L'Invitée*, Françoise 'choisit d'enfermer [Xavière] dans sa chambre après avoir ouvert le gaz' (p. 47). This is a misreading of the text; Xavière shuts herself in her room, locking Françoise out (*L'Invitée*, p. 502).)

¹³ My disagreement with Françoise Hibbs may be due to the fact that our understanding of the notion of closed spaces is not the same. For example, she limits her remarks on *Les Belles images* to the mole image (see below) and deals only with 'Monologue' in *La Femme rompue*. I remain unconvinced by Anne Ophir's suggestion that 'l'appartement clos' is a site of *mauvaise foi* whereas 'la chambre close est le lieu où les personnages féminins regardent la réalité en face'. *Regards féminins*, footnote, p. 32. I can find no evidence for this opposition and make no distinction between enclosed spaces along these lines.

Emptiness is vast, the chasm bottomless. Vertigo/ dizziness, falling are metaphors for a sense of abandonment and loss of self. For Laurence the terror/ horror it inspires is worse than death: 'Et aussi il y a ce creux, ce vide qui glace le sang, qui est pire que la mort [...]' (p. 85). In Greece: 'Il me semblait être arrachée à moi-même. Où étais-je? [...]' Je me disais: "Comme c'est beau!" et j'étais au bord d'un vertige, prise dans un tourbillon, ballotée, niée, réduite à *rien*' (p. 160). 'Une grande fatigue me venait, dans le corps et dans l'âme [...]. [je] coulais à pic dans un gouffre d'indifférence [...]. [...] mon ennui s'exaspérait jusqu'à l'angoisse [...]' (p. 167). In 'L'Age de discrétion' feelings of loss aroused by the woman's separation from her son, Philippe, when he announces that he is going to get married, are mediated by an image of an abyss: 'Il y a eu ce coup de gong dans ma poitrine, le sang à mes joues, toutes mes forces tendues pour réprimer le tremblement de mes lèvres. Un soir d'hiver, les rideaux tirés, la lumière des lampes sur l'arc-en-ciel des coussins et ce gouffre d'absence soudain creusé' (p. 23). Philippe and his wife, Irène come to dinner one evening after their honeymoon; when they leave, or rather when Philippe leaves, the woman's sense of loss is renewed: 'Ce vide de nouveau...' (p. 27). As her crisis deepens, falling/ diving becomes a more persistent notion: 'somber', 'couler à pic', 'se noyer', (p. 45). In addition, emptiness evokes the depression that arises from feelings of abandonment. The woman in 'L'Age de discrétion' suggests her experience of crisis ten years earlier in terms of emptiness: 'Moi aussi j'ai traversé une mauvaise période, il y a dix ans. J'étais dégoûtée de mon corps, Philippe était devenu un adulte, après le succès de mon livre sur Rousseau je me sentais vidée. Vieillir m'angoissait' (p. 16). As Murielle relives the pain of Sylvie's death, her loss, the key image is one of falling. Her sense of abandonment is clear.

Elle est morte. Pour toujours. Je ne le supporte pas. Au secours. J'ai mal trop mal qu'on me sorte de là je ne veux pas que ça recommence la dégringolade non aidez-moi je n'en peux plus ne me laissez pas seule...

(*'Monologue'*, p. 104.)

Of all three stories in the collection, it is in 'La Femme rompue' that images of falling are most profuse. Monique discovers that Maurice has been lying to her about how long his relationship with Noëllie has been going on. She writes in her diary: 'Chaque fois je crois avoir touché le fond. Et puis je m'enfonce plus loin encore dans le doute et le malheur' (p. 170). If she was not altogether surprised to learn that Maurice was having an affair ('je ne suis pas tombée des nues' p. 171), when she is told that the affair started much earlier than Maurice has led her to believe, her distress is experienced as a fall: 'Tandis que Luce me parlait, je tombais, je tombais et je me suis retrouvée complètement brisée' (p. 171). On the thirty-first of January, she writes in her diary: 'Je tombe plus bas, toujours plus bas' (p. 232). When Marie Lambert tells her that she can fall no lower, Monique is scathing: 'Quelle stupidité! On peut toujours descendre plus bas, et plus encore, et encore plus bas. C'est sans fond' (p. 238).

Monique's sense of self has depended on Maurice, his eyes reflected her image back to her, he guaranteed her identity. Now she feels he is judging her and finding her wanting: 'Il pense de moi des choses qu'il ne dit pas: ça me donne le vertige' (p. 180). The metaphor of vertigo communicates Monique's fear as her sense of self is jeopardised. Monique can no longer make sense of the life she has led, she has no more faith in her own judgment. Her identity is bound up with her role as mother and when this is undermined, she experiences similar feelings and the vertigo metaphor recurs. She had prided herself on bringing up her daughters well and is tormented by the idea that she may not have been a good mother and that her life is a failure: 'je ne peux pas le croire. Mais dès que le doute m'effleure, quel vertige!' (p. 214). Her experience of loss and separation is conveyed in a powerful image: 'Quand ça arrive aux autres, ça semble un événement limité, facile à cerner, à surmonter. Et on se trouve absolument seule, dans

une expérience vertigineuse que l'imagination n'a même pas approchée' (p. 192).¹⁴ Her sadness is a fall. The diary entry on Monique's birthday begins with the asyntactic sentence: 'L'affreuse descente au fond de la tristesse' (p. 203). Abandoned, Monique has an overwhelming sense of emptiness. Everything seems a waste of time to her: 'L'amour de Maurice donnait une importance à chaque moment de ma vie. Elle est creuse. Tout est creux: les objets, les instants. Et moi' (p. 210). Despite her disillusionment with her diary because she realises that she cannot and does not tell the truth of her experience, Monique begins to write in it again to resist her consciousness of overwhelming emptiness. She writes: 'le vide était si immense en moi, autour de moi, qu'il fallait ce geste de ma main pour m'assurer que j'étais encore vivante' (p. 223). The cluster of images related to the void and nothingness, that are found in all the texts, combine the motifs of the abyss, vertigo and falling. They evoke the dissolution and loss of self that threaten the women protagonists as they cope with feelings of abandonment and loss. As they lack secure boundaries, their sense of identity is put at risk of expanding to the point of disintegration in the terrifying vastness of the empty space where there is nothing or no one to hold them.

Moving on from this imagery of absence I want now to examine a related group of images of collapse and engulfment that also evoke the protagonists' fear and sense of loss of self. Their tenuous hold on a sense of identity, their fragile boundaries, mean that they are as vulnerable to feelings of being overwhelmed as they are to feelings of abandonment. In *L'Invitée* the threat to Françoise is frequently typified by metaphors of engulfment, of being swallowed alive. Xavière is represented as a natural disaster liable to overwhelm her: 'Avec un peu d'effroi, Françoise considéra cette vivante catastrophe

¹⁴ This image echoes the evocation of the danger Xavière represented to Françoise in *L'Invitée*. 'on ne pouvait pas s'en approcher même en pensée, au moment où elle touchait au bout, la pensée se dissolvait [...]' (pp. 354-55).

qui envahissait sournoisement sa vie; c'était Pierre qui par son respect, son estime avait brisé les digues où Françoise la contenait. Maintenant qu'elle était déchaînée, jusqu'où ça irait-il?' (p. 128). As Laurence's crisis reaches its climax her emotions threaten to submerge her; she is paralysed: 'Des deux mains elle s'accroche à ses draps. Voici venir ce qu'elle redoute plus que la mort: un de ces moments où tout s'effondre; son corps est de pierre, elle voudrait hurler; mais la pierre n'a pas de voix; ni de larmes' (p. 176).

Laurence is overwhelmed as she loses any sense of boundaries, as everything disintegrates, collapses in upon itself. Monique is also submerged by suffering. She writes in her diary: 'La douleur fond sur moi' (p. 141). Her life has collapsed: 'Ma vie derrière moi s'est tout effondrée, comme dans ces tremblements de terre où le sol se dévore lui-même; il s'engloutit dans votre dos au fur et à mesure que vous fuyez' (p. 193). Natural disasters function as a metaphor for the way in which her life has been transformed. During her stay in New York with her daughter, Lucienne, she tells her how she sees herself: '— Comme un marécage. Tout s'est englouti dans la vase' (p. 251) and in her diary she describes her sense of bewilderment and lack of a sense of identity: 'Le noir et le blanc se confondent, le monde est un magma et je n'ai plus de contours' (p. 251). The image used to evoke the sleep of the woman in 'L'Age de discrétion', underlines the notions of blackness, thickness, stickiness and suggests drowning/ submergence: 'J'avais sombré dans des épaisseurs noires; c'était liquide et étouffant, du mazout, et ce matin j'émergeais à peine' (p. 45).¹⁵ She opens her eyes to find André eager to make up; she is faced with a choice: 'Me raidir davantage, couler à pic, me noyer dans les épaisseurs de solitude et de nuit. Ou essayer d'attraper cette main qui se tendait' (p. 45).

¹⁵ Laurence in *Les Belles images* refers to her dreamless sleep as 'ces épaisseurs de nuit' (p. 71).

Natural disasters also figure powerful emotions that shake characters' being and threaten to overwhelm them. When Françoise realises that Pierre is seriously considering going on tour with the theatre company and taking Xavière along with them, something that does not at all fit in with her plans, 'ce fut une tournade qui secoua Françoise de la tête aux pieds' (p. 210). The hyperbole in the later fiction is comparable to that found in *L'Invitée*. When Jean-Charles and Laurence quarrel about Catherine, the way that he brings up Laurence's breakdown five years earlier ('il lui jetait l'incident au visage avec une espèce de hargne') is experienced by Laurence as a violent betrayal ('Quelle trahison!' p. 133). She goes against the code of behaviour instilled in her since childhood and for once, does not repress her anger at Jean-Charles: 'Boire un verre d'eau, faire de la gymnastique: non. Cette fois elle se donne à sa colère; un ouragan se déchaîne dans sa poitrine, il secoue toutes ses cellules, c'est une douleur physique, mais on se sent vivre' (p. 134). The woman in 'L'Age de discrétion' is submerged by feelings she had been repressing: 'Soudain ça déferlait sur moi, une avalanche de soupçons, de malaises que j'avais refoulés' (p. 34). Her anger at André is 'une tournade qui [l]'emporte à des milliers de kilomètres de lui et d'[elle]-même dans une solitude à la fois brûlante et glacée' (p. 40). Their quarrel is 'un tourbillon fumeux' (p. 47). In 'Monologue', Murielle imagines her revenge in apocalyptic terms that translate the intensity of her rage:

Le vent! soudain il s'est mis à souffler en tournade que j'aimerais un grand cataclysme qui balaierait tout et moi avec un typhon un cyclone mourir me reposerait s'il ne restait personne pour penser à moi; leur abandonner mon cadavre ma pauvre vie non! Mais plonger tous dans le néant ce serait bien.'

('Monologue', p. 100.)

In all of the texts the imagery of engulfment evokes the characters' fears of being overwhelmed, of losing themselves. Associated images of natural disasters suggest the

powerful emotions that also threaten to swamp them and undermine their sense of cohesion

Images of engulfment intersect with another important cluster of painful images that mediate the experience of madness, a cluster of images relating to weight, enclosure and immobilisation. These typically Gothic images in the later fiction recall the network of such images in *L'Invitée* where Françoise's experience of the threats to her self was evoked by them. Laurence's pain is heavy and hard: 'Il restait cette barre de fer dans ma poitrine' (p. 45). Her feelings are petrified and she does not want her daughter, Catherine to suffer the same fate: 'Faudra-t-il qu'elle devienne une femme comme moi, avec des pierres dans la poitrine et des fumées de soufre dans la tête?' (p. 122). Laurence feels imprisoned in her life and looks on the trip to Greece as an attempt to break out (see pp. 154 and 170). In Greece, Laurence exchanges one prison for another; she feels crushed by the weight of history: 'Je me sens étrangère à tous ces siècles défunts et ils m'écrasent' (p. 161). The key image of the mole (see below) also suggests Laurence is trapped. In her version of the story the mole does not emerge into the fresh air at all; tragically, although it opens its eyes, it remains trapped in its tunnel where all it sees is blackness (p. 169). There are also overtones of live burial here. Laurence's sense of being trapped is underlined as she identifies with a young suicide in prison, projecting her pain onto him: 'le frêle cadavre accroché aux barreaux de la fenêtre' (p. 85). The image of the circle used in *L'Invitée* to suggest Françoise's sense of imprisonment, ('[Françoise] avait envie de briser ce cercle magique où elle se trouvait retenue avec Pierre et Xavière et qui la séparait de tout le reste du monde' p. 345), reappears in a much less elaborate, more banal form in *Les Belles Images*. Laurence regrets the fact that each of us is 'confiné dans son petit cercle' (p. 71). She is obsessed by a Buñuel film, envying the characters 'enfermés dans un cercle magique, des gens

répétaient par hasard un moment de leur passé; ils renouaient le fil du temps et évitaient le piège où, sans le savoir, ils étaient tombés' (p. 153).¹⁶

Images of weight also characterise *La Femme rompue*. Just as Xavière experienced the trio as heavy, 'comme une gangue' (p. 255), the woman in 'L'Age de discrétion' imagines her future with André, 'chacun dans sa gangue' (p. 75). Gothic images of live burial in *L'Invitée* find an echo in 'Monologue'. Murielle is buried alive: 'c'était moi qu'on enterrait. Je suis enterrée. Ils se sont tous ligüés pour m'enfoncer' (p. 99). The silence in her flat is the silence of death, the same silence that had characterised 'la chambre mortuaire' when Sylvie died (p. 111). Looks condemned her without appeal then and now she is imprisoned: 'Ils voudraient me supprimer ils m'ont mise en cage. Enfermée claquemurée je finirai par mourir d'ennui vraiment mourir' (p. 106). Monique is also imprisoned, buried alive. She has decided to shut herself away (like Laurence in *Les Belles Images*, like the woman in 'L'Age de discrétion'): 'J'ai choisi de me terror dans mon caveau' (p. 221). Dirt is a protective shell: 'La chambre pue le tabac froid et l'alcool, il y a des cendres partout, je suis sale, les draps sont sales, le ciel est sale derrière les vitres sales, cette saleté est une coquille qui me protège' (p. 222). The dirty sky recalls Murielle's dirty moon. Monique feels she is in one of Poe's Gothic tales trapped by 'les murs de fer qui se rapprochent' (p. 242) (see below). Rejected sexually by Maurice, it seems to her that she is 'au fond d'un tombeau, le sang figé dans [ses] veines, incapable de bouger ou de pleurer' (p. 163). Her dreams are Gothic nightmares:

Souvent en rêve je m'évanouis de malheur. Je reste là sous les yeux de Maurice, paralysée, avec sur mon visage toute la douleur du monde. J'attends qu'il se

¹⁶ In Luis Buñuel's film, *El ángel exterminador*, (1962), an invisible magic barrier prevents bourgeois guests at a dinner party from leaving the room in which they are assembled. The guests regress to primitive brutality and cannibalism; some of them become ill, one dies and two young lovers kill themselves. Only when the guests return to exactly the same positions they were in when the spell first prevented their leaving, is the spell broken. Shortly afterwards, the spell begins again and the guests find themselves unable to leave the cathedral where they have gathered for a thanksgiving service. See Aranda, Francisco, *Luis Buñuel: A Critical Biography*, trans. and ed. by David Robinson, New York: Da Capo Press, 1976, pp. 206-13.

précipite vers moi. Il me jette un regard indifférent et s'éloigne. Je me suis réveillée, c'était encore la nuit; je sentais le poids des ténèbres, j'étais dans un corridor, je m'y engouffrais, il devenait de plus en plus étroit, je respirais à peine; bientôt il faudrait ramper et j'y resterais coincée jusqu'à ce que j'expire. J'ai hurlé. Et je me suis mise à l'appeler plus doucement, dans les larmes.

(*'La Femme rompue'*, pp. 192-93.)

She wakes in the dream to an even more terrifying scene. The dream/ reality boundary becomes uncertain and vague. Suffocation and live burial are familiar motifs. The cumulative effect of this cluster of images of weight and enclosure/ imprisonment and immobilisation, that recur in all our texts, is a forceful sense of helplessness and suffering and fear. This is amplified by the next, closely connected cluster of images I am going on to consider, images of death and paralysis.¹⁷

Death is a recurring motif in *L'Invitée* and in the later fiction.¹⁸ In *Les Belles Images* and *La Femme rompue*, death is typified as cold, silence and emptiness. Images return obsessively to death. Laurence is haunted by a sense of nothingness at the heart of life, 'ce creux, ce vide, qui glace le sang, qui est pire que la mort' (p. 85). She had known this sense of emptiness during her breakdown five years earlier. It is what drives people to commit suicide and for Laurence 'c'est ce qui fait froid aux os quand on lit le récit d'un suicide: non le frêle cadavre accroché aux barreaux de la fenêtre, mais ce qui s'est passé dans ce coeur, juste avant' (p. 85). It is a sense that she experiences again as she lies in bed trying to understand what is happening to her: 'Voici venir ce qu'elle redoute plus que la mort: un de ces moments où tout s'effondre; son corps est de pierre, elle voudrait hurler; mais la pierre n'a pas de voix; ni de larmes' (p. 176). Laurence is paralysed as everything collapses into itself and she is on the point of being sucked into the void.¹⁹ Nothingness, death-in-life is an experience that the protagonists in *La*

¹⁷ Images of death and paralysis are also embedded in the cluster of images related to the void and nothingness.

¹⁸ Elaine Marks studies the theme of death in Simone de Beauvoir's works in *Simone de Beauvoir: Encounters with Death*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1973.

¹⁹ This recalls Françoise's paralysis in the night-club in *L'Invitée*, pp. 356 and 364.

Femme rompue all have in common with Laurence to some extent. The woman in 'L'Age de discrétion' feels her life is over and, in an image reminiscent of that used in *L'Invitée* to evoke Françoise's sense of barrenness ('Ce n'était pas vraiment un avenir: c'était une étendue de temps uniforme et nu' p. 291), her life is represented metaphorically as a desert through which she has to drag herself towards death (p. 68). Death dominates her horizon (pp. 83-4). Death is also at the heart of 'Monologue'. Murielle's thoughts return obsessively to her daughter's suicide and funeral. She imagines her own death: 'Je peux bien clamecer avec mon pauvre coeur surmené personne n'en saura rien ça me fout la trouille. Derrière la porte ils trouveront une charogne je puerai j'aurai chié sous moi des rats m'auront bouffé le nez' (p. 96). Deprived of others' attention, her sense of self is tenuous: 'Comme si j'étais effacée du monde. Comme si je n'avais jamais existé' (p. 111). Like Laurence, Murielle finds death itself easier to bear than the pain of certain thoughts: 'assez assez j'aime mieux mourir sur place que de revivre ces heures-là' (p. 113). She fantasises about committing suicide to blackmail or punish Tristan: 'm'ouvrir les veines sur leur paillason ça ou autre chose j'ai des armes' (p. 93); 'je me descendrai dans son salon je m'ouvrirai les vaines quand ils se ramèneront il y aura du sang partout et je serai morte...' (p. 118). Yet she wants to live: 'je veux vivre' (p. 96); 'je veux vivre je veux revivre' (p. 99). Death is a key motif in 'La Femme rompue' as well. Maurice's hostility during a quarrel made Monique's blood run cold ('soudain mon sang s'est glacé' p. 191), it was like a premonition of death: 'Ensuite il m'a persuadée que c'était une dispute semblable à beaucoup d'autres. Mais le froid de la mort m'avait effleurée' (pp. 191-92). In the depths of her depression she is dead in life, one of the living dead: 'Maintenant je suis une morte. Une morte qui a encore combien d'années à tirer? Déjà une journée, quand j'ouvre un oeil, le matin, il me semble impossible d'arriver au bout' (p. 251). Life is

movement; in life she is paralysed as she has been in her recurring nightmares. Simple gestures like lifting her arm or putting one foot in front of the other present enormous difficulties. Alone, '[elle] reste immobile pendant des minutes sur le bord du trottoir, entièrement paralysée' (p. 252).²⁰ Once back in Paris, the temptation is to remain paralysed, not to open the door to the future: 'Ne pas bouger; jamais. Arrêter le temps et la vie' (p. 252). Death-in-life haunts the women protagonists in all the texts. It is a metaphor for the despair at the heart of existence. The image of paralysis captures a sense of hopelessness and wretchedness. Although ending the pain of existence is an option almost all of them consider, each of them ultimately chooses life, however bleak.

L'Invitée, *Les Belles Images* and *La Femme rompue* are sombre works. In the imaginary universes created by Simone de Beauvoir, images of black and night recur. In her memoirs Simone de Beauvoir uses these images to encapsulate Laurence's situation; telling Laurence's story, she wished to 'faire transparaître du fond de sa nuit la laideur du monde où elle étouffait'.²¹ They are images used by Simone de Beauvoir in connection with *La Femme rompue* as well; transposing into fiction stories of women who 'se débattaient dans l'ignorance', her intention was to 'donner à voir leur nuit'.²² Ignorance, depression, pain, fear; dark and night enjoy a multiplicity of connotations.²³ There are a number of series of images relating to darkness that overlap and intersect within and between texts. I trace a pathway through these clusters of images, connecting

²⁰ Readers recall that Françoise in *L'Invitée* 'eut envie de s'asseoir au bord du trottoir et de n'en plus bouger' (p. 421). In 'Monologue' the fact that inertia keeps Murielle in her armchair might be read as a pseudo-paralysis. See p. 91: 'Merde je crève de soif j'ai faim mais me lever de mon fauteuil aller à la cuisine me tue'. She is still in her armchair when she makes the telephone call to Tristan that will bring to an end (for now) her monologue (p. 114). (It is for this reason that I cannot agree with Phil Powrie that we imagine Murielle 'pacing up and down her flat'. See 'Rereading between The Lines' p. 322.)

²¹ *Tout compte fait*, p. 172.

²² *Tout compte fait*, p. 175. In 'Prière d'insérer' Simone de Beauvoir wrote: 'J'ai voulu faire entendre ici les voix de trois femmes qui se débattent avec des mots dans des situations sans issue'. Francis and Gontier, *Les Écrits*, pp. 231-32. This suggests a much less severe judgment of her characters.

²³ The cluster of images related to darkness follows on naturally from images of death but it also intersects with the group of images that evoke emptiness.

images of darkness and night and blindness that are metaphors for failed understanding with other images of troubled vision and opaqueness that work in a parallel way, intensifying the resonances each cluster has in the texts. The experience of madness is conveyed by images that evoke the distress of incomprehension and epistemological insecurity and the bleakness of depression.

Images oppose darkness on the one hand and knowledge and clarity of vision/ an ability to see on the other. In *L'Invitée*, Françoise imagines the future to be a dark tunnel 'dont il faudrait subir aveuglément les détours' (p. 291). Her dependance on Xavière grows and with it her uncertainty; her lack of secure knowledge is evoked by the image of night: 'Elle n'y voyait plus clair, plus clair du tout. Il n'y avait que des débris informes autour d'elle, et le vide en elle et partout la nuit' (p. 314). Night and emptiness are intertwined. This image is echoed in a key image in *Les Belles Images*. Laurence who feels literally and metaphysically completely empty/ emptied (she has just vomitted), identifies herself with a mole:

Il fait nuit en elle; elle s'abandonne à la nuit. Elle pense à une histoire qu'elle a lue: une taupe tâtonne à travers des galeries souterraines, elle en sort et sent la fraîcheur de l'air; mais elle ne sait pas inventer d'ouvrir les yeux. Elle se la raconte autrement: la taupe dans son souterrain invente d'ouvrir les yeux, et elle voit que tout est noir. Ça n'a aucun sens.

(*Les Belles Images*, p. 169.)²⁴

The mole inhabits a milieu where it has no need to 'see', there is no light. Out of its milieu, where to see would have some meaning, it is unable to work out how to see. Laurence's situation is more tragic. She is trapped in a milieu where there is no need to see and yet she does open her eyes and sees only blackness, that there is nothing to

²⁴ Simone de Beauvoir talks about her use of this image in an interview with Jacqueline Piatier, *Le Monde*, 23 December 1966, p. 17. Of Laurence she says: 'Elle soupçonne la vérité, elle la cherche, mais elle ne va pas au bout de sa quête'. She adds that she borrowed the image from Alain Badiou's *Almagestes*, thus signalling, as Elizabeth Fallaize points out, a connection between *Les Belles images* and this experimental work (*The Novels*, p. 140, footnote 2).

see.²⁵ It is an image that recurs in the final pages of the novel: 'Cette taupe qui ouvre les yeux et voit qu'il fait noir, à quoi ça l'avance-t-il? Refermer les yeux. Et Catherine? lui clouer les paupières?' (p. 180). '[...] peut-être elle s'en sortira... De quoi? De cette nuit. De l'ignorance, de l'indifférence' (p. 181). Laurence is resigned to her fate; not seeing is the easier option for her. But for her daughter, there is a glimmer of hope; if Laurence can help her to see, then maybe she will not have to spend her life trapped in the same dark tunnel. These images pick up the notion of Laurence's blindness, first evoked during the trip to Greece with her father: '[...] aveugle à toutes ces choses que mon père me montrait. (Ses yeux, ceux de Catherine: des visions différentes mais colorées, émouvantes; et moi à côté d'eux, aveugle)' (p. 157). Colour and light have gone out of Laurence's life. Her 'blindness' makes her insensible to beauty.

In 'L'Age de discrétion', depression is suggested in similar terms. The woman asks, initially in relation to André and also recalling her own bout of depression ten years earlier, 'Que faire quand le monde s'est décoloré?' (p. 16). As her own stability and well-being become increasingly jeopardized, her mood darkens and casts a shadow over her whole existence: '[...] j'avais le coeur lourd et ma tristesse faisait tâche d'huile; elle assombrissait le monde' (p. 32). This recalls the effect that Xavière has on Françoise's life in *L'Invitée*: 'Xavière s'obstinait à demeurer cette étrangère dont la présence refusée étendait sur Françoise une ombre menaçante' (p. 420); 'cette présence ennemie qui étendait sur elle, sur le monde entier, une ombre perniciose' (p. 484).

²⁵ A number of critics neglect the second part of this image and simply assert that Laurence compares herself with a mole that cannot open its eyes. See, for example, Hibbs p. 48. Her argument that Laurence is a prisoner of her milieu and its myths is convincing but contradicted to some extent by her identifying Laurence with the image of the mole that emerges from the tunnel into the fresh air. Jane Heath reads the metaphor of the mole in terms of ideology and false consciousness. I am somewhat puzzled by her assertion that the mole in the first version of the story could open its eyes and see the light (pp. 125-26).

In 'La Femme rompue', as Monique loses her sense of self, her identity ('j'ai perdu mon image'), darkness and blindness evoke her sense of loss and emptiness as well as her inability to make sense of her existence and who she is: 'Il fait noir, je ne me vois plus' (p. 238). Monique comes to realise that she does not even possess her past, fully know her past: 'C'est horrible de penser que ma propre histoire n'est plus derrière moi que ténèbres' (p. 225). Images of dark and night are echoed in the final pages of the story. Monique is severely depressed, unsure not only of who she is but how she should be (p. 251) she writes: 'Autour de moi, la nuit est toujours aussi épaisse' (p. 252). Darkness is pervasive.

Troubled vision is a recurring metaphor. Threatened by madness, the women in Simone de Beauvoir's fiction struggle to understand what is happening to them, to see clearly. In 'La Femme rompue' Monique is blinded ('aveuglée') by a vivid, visual memory ('une image') of Maurice as he had been when he was first in love with her. She realises that for years she has seen Maurice as through the veil of this image. We read: 'ce souvenir se superpose, comme une mousseline diaphane, aux visions que j'ai de lui' (pp. 162-63). In a moment with Gothic overtones this image disintegrates ('est tombée en poussière') as it collides with reality, is mirrored, in the same hotel room where it had been generated and comes into contact with the man of flesh and blood. The discrepancy between the mood in the image and the mood in reality is too great. The image that had seemed frozen ('figée') but still shiny and fresh had in fact decayed. The woman in 'L'Age de discrétion' also has a kind of double vision of André, her husband. She no longer knows who he is:

Comme lorsqu'on a reçu un choc sur le crâne, que la vision s'est troublée, qu'on aperçoit du monde deux images, à des hauteurs différentes, sans pouvoir situer le dessus et le dessous. Les deux images que j'avais d'André au passé, au présent, ne s'ajustaient pas.

(*'L'Age de discrétion'*, p. 42.)

A related series of images concern opaqueness. Fog, fumes, vapours are metaphors for emotions that hinder lucidity analogous to the way in which darkness functions in the texts. In *L'Invitée* Françoise wants to see clearly what is happening to her, 'Je veux voir clair', but she is prevented from doing so; 'sa tête était remplie d'un grand tournoiement rougeâtre et piquant' (p. 192). Her lack of lucidity is 'le brouillard' (p. 193). In *Les Belles Images* the same image is used to evoke Laurence's fear: 'autour d'elle la peur est épaisse comme un brouillard' (p. 48). This image is echoed later in the text: 'Je n'avais pas réussi à m'évader de ma prison, je la voyais refermer sur moi tandis que l'avion plongeait dans le brouillard' (p. 170). The fog enshrouding Paris airport suggests Laurence's deepening sense of enclosure and submergence. In an interesting image, Laurence is described as a woman 'avec des pierres dans la poitrine et des fumées de soufre dans la tête' (p. 122). This image is redolent of the burning fires of hell, a familiar motif in *L'Invitée*. In 'L'Age de discrétion' the same insistence on redness and opacity is found in the metaphor for the woman's anger. It reproduces Françoise's experience: 'Il y avait soudain des fumées rouges dans ma tête, un brouillard rouge devant mes yeux, quelque chose de rouge qui criait dans ma gorge' (p. 40). The woman's quarrel with André is 'un tourbillon fumeux, de la fumée sans feu' (p. 47); its very lack of substance makes it hard to clear up ('se dissiper'). Alone in their flat, the woman sinks into depression and obsession. She manages to steady herself: 'je m'arrachais à ces brumes' (p. 58). Monique in 'La Femme rompue' discovers that life is opaque, that we do not know anything about anyone including ourselves (p. 248). The accumulation of images of vision overarched by images of darkness in all the texts conveys the women protagonists' painful struggle to make sense of existence.

There are two other key clusters of images that centre on darkness in the texts.

Firstly, black is the colour of the future, evocative of hurt and loss. The images of *L'Invitée* reappear in the later fiction but are understated, more restrained. 'La fenêtre était noire' (*La Femme rompue*, p. 127). This image opens the diary entry that Monique writes on returning home late one evening to an empty flat.²⁶ Ostensibly before she suspects Maurice of being unfaithful, she nevertheless finds herself comparing the present with before, '— avant quoi? —' she asks herself. The image of the dark window evokes Monique's sense of aloneness and abandonment. It is echoed in the final diary entry where she records her return to the flat now that Maurice has moved out: 'La fenêtre était noire; elle sera toujours noire' (p. 252).²⁷ The lonely future threatening Monique, symbolised by a dark window, is depicted in a Gothic image; the future is something menacing lurking behind a closed door: 'Une porte fermée, quelque chose qui guette derrière. [...] je verrai ce qu'il y a derrière la porte. C'est l'avenir. [...] Il n'y a que cette porte et ce qui guette derrière' (p. 252). Repetition underlines Monique's fear, communicates her anxiety. The suspense created is also a feature of the Gothic. The emphasis on black is remindful of the images that communicate Françoise's detachment in the face of the ominous future she apprehends:

[...] elle se laissait flotter passivement comme une épave, mais il y avait de noirs écueils partout à l'horizon; elle flottait sur un océan gris, tout autour d'elle s'étendaient des eaux bitumeuses et soufrées, et elle faisait la planche sans penser à rien, sans rien craindre et sans rien désirer.

(*L'Invitée*, p. 236.)²⁸

²⁶ This episode is read differently by Phil Powrie. He writes: '[Monique] rushes up the stairs to her flat, commenting on the lack of light coming through the curtains'. ('Rereading Between The Lines' p. 326.) Yet, in fact, that evening Monique walked up the stairs and opened the door with her key. In the past, when the light coming through the curtains showed that Maurice was at home waiting for her, she would run upstairs and ring the doorbell, too impatient to look for her key. There is a characteristic tension between the imperfect and perfect tenses in the relevant passage and a striking use of rhythm to contrast past excitement with present depression. See 'La Femme rompue', p. 127: 'Je montais les deux étages en courant, je sonnais, trop impatiente pour chercher ma clé. je suis montée sans courir, j'ai mis la clé dans la serrure'.

²⁷ This image is a reversal of the image in *L'Invitée*, where, in the middle of the night, Françoise sees one lit up window in the dark theatre: 'une vitre rose dans une façade noire' (p. 13).

²⁸ Paralysis is also underlined here.

When Xavière quarrels with Pierre and the trio is destabilised, Françoise bursts into tears at the prospect of the future, 'un noir enfer' (p. 397). The image of night is used to evoke Françoise's dismay and terror when she knows that Xavière has read her letters from Gerbert and to convey her dread of the future: 'Une nuit âcre et brûlante venait de s'abattre sur le monde. [...] Devant elle et en elle cette nuit de bitume' (p. 497). The horizon is dark for the woman in 'L'Age de discrétion' too. She knows what horrendous things the future holds but not how to cope with that knowledge:

Ne pas regarder trop loin. Au loin c'étaient les horreurs de la mort et des adieux; c'étaient des râteliers, les sciatiques, les infirmités la stérilité mentale, la solitude dans un monde étranger que nous ne comprendrons plus et qui continuera sa course sans nous. Réussirai-je à ne pas lever les yeux vers ces horizons? Ou apprendrai-je à les apercevoir sans épouvante?

('L'Age de discrétion', pp. 83-4.)

The horrors enumerated are intimate and ordinary and all the more threatening.

The final cluster of images to do with darkness constructs black as the colour of pain and hatred. In *L'Invitée* the idea of Élisabeth's pain in relation to her long term affair with Claude prompts Françoise to exclaim, 'comme il devait faire noir dans son coeur!' (p. 31). In *Les Belles Images* Laurence is frightened by the vehemence of Dominique's reaction to Gilbert's rejection: 'Il fait si noir dans ce coeur, des serpents s'y tordent' (p. 117).²⁹

Emphasis on black in all the texts contributes to the pervasive atmosphere of pain and despair. Light in the texts is opposed to dark and opaqueness but it is not benign. Hope is a light that pierces Françoise's black dismay and terror but it is a hope

²⁹ Dominique is constructed as a quasi-demoniacal character, reminiscent of Xavière. (The name Dominique suggests 'dominer'.) Laurence has always felt slightly afraid of her mother and since her parents' divorce 'il y avait toujours eu autour de Dominique une espèce de halo maléfique' (p. 52). The sinister flowers in Dominique's lounge are emblematic: 'Dans un vase, un énorme bouquet de fleurs jaunes et aiguës qui ressemblent à de méchants oiseaux' (p. 49); 'Laurence revoit les fleurs qui ressemblaient à de méchants oiseaux' (p. 100). (After the reconciliation between Laurence's father and Dominique, these flowers will be replaced by 'des fleurs printanières' p. 176, a further sign of Dominique's duplicity as far as Laurence is concerned.)

that Xavière has taken her own life (*L'Invitée*, p. 497). Similarly, what shines through Laurence's fear is hatred: 'autour d'elle la peur est épaisse comme un brouillard; mais lumineuse, dure, une évidence perce ces ténèbres: «je le hais!»' (p. 48). Light is associated with pain. This has already been discussed in relation to *L'Invitée* where the metaphor of light is used to evoke the painfulness of lucidity and self knowledge: 'Avec un éblouissement douloureux, Françoise se sentit transpercée d'une lumière aride et blanche qui ne laissait en elle aucun recoin d'espoir' (p. 180). In *Les Belles Images*, Laurence sees herself reflected in Lucien, her lover's eyes and, feeling endangered by the strength of his love for her, finds the brightness of her image almost unbearable: 'Il la regarde avec ses yeux où brille d'un éclat presque insoutenable son image' (p. 61). The notion of the gaze has already been associated in *Les Belles Images* with light that is menacing; Laurence visualises the light of a boat probing the river bank: 'fouillant les rives de son regard blanc' (p. 21). As the light strikes the window panes it starkly lights up loving couples. The words 'brutalement' and 'éclabousser' add to the negative overtones that clash with the overt mood of Laurence's vision. In 'L'Age de discrétion' the motif of the neon light that recurs a number of times, acquires symbolic significance. During the woman's discussion with André about their son, Philippe, the neon light outside their window flashes from red to green (p. 31). As the woman comes to realise how things have changed, that she has cherished illusions, she sits in a café 'les yeux blessés par la cruelle lumière de néon' (p. 41). The sun is also cruel. Just as she is unable to enjoy her leisure time once all her time is leisure time, the woman prefers the filtered light of the sun through the blinds: 'il m'aveugle si je l'affronte dans sa crudité torride' (p. 58).³⁰ Light as well as darkness is associated with blindness and

³⁰ The harshness of light underlined here, recalls the image Laurence applies to her husband: 'auprès de Jean-Charles il est toujours midi: une lumière égale et crue' (*Les Belles Images*, p. 59).

failure to comprehend. As she faces up to the reality of her relationship with André, the long climb in the sun symbolises the painful struggle to self awareness: 'Le soleil me vrillait les tempes [...]. La lumière me blessait les yeux [...]' (p. 70).

In contrast to bright light, the dimmer light of the setting sun and moonlight are connoted positively in the text. They are depicted as gifts: 'Des choses que j'aimais ont disparu. Beaucoup d'autres m'ont été données. Hier soir, je remontais le boulevard Raspail et le ciel était cramoisi [...]' (p. 17). (Significantly 'les arbres cachaient le rougeoiement d'une enseigne au néon'.) They are unanticipated, unsought for pleasures: 'Clairs de lune et couchers de soleil, odeur de printemps mouillé, de goudron chaud, lueurs et saisons, j'ai connu des instants au pur éclat de diamant; mais toujours sans les avoir sollicités' (p. 58). The woman's reconciliation with André takes place in moonlight, a conventional romantic setting, the romantic tone apparently reinforced by a quotation from *Aucassin et Nicolette*³¹: 'La lune brillait ainsi que la petite étoile qui l'escorte fidèlement et une grande paix est descendue en moi' (pp. 79-80). She takes gratuitous pleasure in gazing at 'des toits de tuiles, baignés de clair de lune' (p. 80). However, the moonlight suggests that the woman is failing to see her situation clearly. It is as if she has failed to absorb the lesson of her experience, to take in the message that things change. Her words here are a direct echo of her words at the very beginning of the story: 'Le monde se crée sous mes yeux dans un éternel présent; je m'habitue si vite à ses visages qu'il ne me paraît pas changer' (p. 11); 'La perpétuelle jeunesse du monde me tient en haleine' (p. 17); 'Et cette renaissance et cette permanence me donnaient une impression d'éternité. La terre me semblait fraîche comme aux premiers âges et cet

³¹ Phil Powrie discusses the significance of this quotation and the unintentional irony produced by the comic context of *Aucassin et Nicolette* in *Rereading Between The Lines*, pp. 323-24. His argument is ambiguous; although the irony may be unintentional on the part of the character/ narrator, there is no evidence to suggest that it is unintentional on the part of the implied author. It would not be inconsistent for Simone de Beauvoir to undercut the reconciliation between the woman and André.

instant se suffisait' (p. 80). The woman's belief in permanency and perpetual juvenescence is unshaken.³²

Images of light and the moon reappear in 'Monologue'. Significantly, Murielle has drawn her curtains against the bright Christmas lights. She tells how she clung to the shadow of the walls and avoided the sun after Sylvie's death: '[...] je n'osais plus sortir de chez moi je me faufilais le long des murs le soleil me clouait au pilori' (pp. 112-13), as if she were being accused by the sun. The moon plays a special symbolic role in 'Monologue'. Murielle identifies with the moon. Traditionally a feminine symbol and a symbol of madness, in this story it also takes on connotations of lost purity and innocence. 'Je l'aimais la lune elle me ressemblait; et ils l'ont salie comme ils salissent tout c'était affreux ces photos; une pauvre chose poussiéreuse et grisâtre que n'importe qui pourra fouler aux pieds' (p. 89). Murielle shares the moon's victim status, she too is trampled underfoot: 'une femme seule ils se croient tout permis c'est si lâche les gens quand vous êtes à terre ils vous piétinent' (p. 93). But, according to Murielle, she, unlike the moon, remains pure and innocent: 'J'étais propre pure intransigeante' (p. 89); 'je suis propre' (p. 90); 'je suis trop propre trop blanche' (p. 105). She is different from everyone else: 'je suis le merle blanc. Pauvre merle blanc: il est seul au monde' (p. 106). The purity of white is opposed to the black and dirt of guilt that Murielle projects onto others.

Violent, cruel images predominate in all three texts. Different clusters of these images mediate the suffering of madness. They are hyperbolic. Many of the images considered so far have a violent edge. Violence and pain are common in *L'Invitée* where images foreground biting, tearing, burning and squeezing. Violent images also

³² This cluster of images of positively connoted light could equally be placed with the clusters of positive images treated at the end of this chapter; the evocation of glittering moments and the woman's feelings of plenitude and well-being, together with the fact that the reconciliation takes place in an elevated position, are details that cut across the images collected together as clusters of 'happy' imagery.

characterise *Les Belles Images*. Strangulation: 'l'horreur prend Laurence à la gorge, l'horreur de ce qui s'est passé en Dominique pendant ces quelques instants, de ce qui se passe en ce moment.' (p. 124). Murder:

Moi aussi j'étais possédée par cette enfant que la musique possédait. Cet instant passionné n'aurait pas de fin. La petite danseuse ne grandirait pas; pendant l'éternité elle tournerait sur elle-même et je la regarderais.[...] Petite condamnée à mort, affreuse mort sans cadavre. La vie allait l'assassiner. Je pensais à Catherine qu'on était en train d'assassiner.

(*Les Belles Images*, p. 158.)

Laurence realises what the treatment she has agreed to means for Catherine. ('Sous prétexte de guérir Catherine [...] on allait la mutiler' p. 159.) Cure is mutilation. Rape: '[...] discuter en public le cas de Catherine. Une trahison, un viol' (p. 173).

In 'L'Age de discrétion' a violent image of strangulation is used to describe the woman's repression of fond memories of her son: 'Tant de souvenirs émouvants, bouleversants, délicieux se levaient en moi. Je leur tordrais le cou' (p. 37). Torture, a key image in *L'Invitée*, (in the trio 'leur amour ne leur servait qu'à se torturer les uns les autres p. 397), is picked up again in *La Femme rompue*. Murielle in 'Monologue' fantasises about telling her son how Tristan has tortured and hit her (p. 93) and complains of 'déjà cinq ans de ce supplice' (p. 106). It is as if she is being killed slowly and painfully: 'J'ai mal j'ai trop mal ils me tuent à petit feu' (p. 118). She imagines taking her revenge, forcing God to do her will so that she can enjoy her sadistic pleasure: 'Eux tous ils se tordront dans les flammes de l'envie je les regarderai rôtir et gémir je rirai je rirai [...]' (p. 118). This image is reminiscent of images of burning and hell in *L'Invitée* which are associated with Françoise's shame and suffering when her relationship with Gerbert is discovered by Xavière. Monique accuses Maurice of torture: 'On m'a envoyée chez le psychiatre, on m'a fait reprendre des forces avant de m'assener

le coup définitif. C'est comme ces médecins nazis qui ranimaient les victimes pour qu'on recommence à les torturer. Je lui ai crié: «Nazi! Tortionnaire!»' (p. 241).

In *L'Invitée*, Françoise's emotional and physical suffering was evoked by images of tearing, burning, biting and stabbing. One major series of images in the later fiction is to do with sharpness, cutting, stabbing and breaking. A recurring image is of splintered, shattered images. As Dominique is in the throes of anguish, Laurence exclaims: 'Ah! toutes les images ont volé en éclats, et il ne sera jamais possible de les raccommoder' (p. 124). When Laurence goes to see the psychiatrist who is treating Catherine, we read: 'J'étais sur la défensive: hérissée de fils de fer barbelés' (p. 171). The pain of Laurence's emotions and thoughts is suggested by images of stabbing: 'Pointe de feu à travers le coeur. Anxiété, remords' (p. 135).). In the final chapter of *Les Belles Images* when Laurence takes to her bed these images gather momentum as her breakdown and pain reach a climax. They are related to words and ideas, to language. Laurence realises that her holiday with her father is almost over and that she has not got to know him any better: 'cette pensée que je retenais depuis... quand? m'a soudain transpercée' (p. 167). Then,

[...] terrassée par une galopade d'images et de mots qui défilaient dans sa tête, se battant entre eux comme des kriss malais dans un tiroir fermé (si on l'ouvre, tout est en ordre). Elle ouvre le tiroir. Je suis tout simplement jalouse. [...] Le tiroir est refermé, les kriss se battent.

(*Les Belles Images*, p. 179.)

When Laurence names her pain: 'J'ai été *déçue*. Le mot la poignarde' (p. 179). One of the most violent and disturbing images in *Les Belles Images* is the metaphor for protecting/ mutilating Catherine, preventing her from seeing; the image of nailing down/ shut her eyelids; Laurence wonders if she should 'lui clouer les paupières?'. The image of a sharp nail piercing a child's eyes is vivid and repellent.³³

³³ There is a link here with the cluster of images related to 'not seeing' discussed earlier.

We have seen that light can be painful. The action of light is associated with metal and cutting. In 'L'Age de discrétion' the sun pierces the woman's forehead: 'Le soleil me vrillait les tempes' (p. 70). Cutting is an image that recurs in 'La Femme rompue' to evoke Monique's pain, past and present: 'Les premiers mensonges de Lucienne et de Colette m'ont scié bras et jambes' (p. 134) finds a direct echo in: 'On me scie le coeur avec une scie aux dents très fines' (p. 141). The remnants of Monique's hope are represented metaphorically as sharp, painful splinters: 'Ah! ces échardes d'espoir qui de temps en temps me traversent le coeur, plus douloureuses que le désespoir même' (p. 197). In a Gothic image Monique sees herself as a character in one of Poe's tales, trapped and tortured, a knife about to penetrate her heart:

Je pense à la nouvelle de Poe: les murs de fer qui se rapprochent, et le pendule en forme de couteau oscille au-dessus de mon coeur. A certains moments il s'arrête, mais jamais il ne remonte. Il n'est plus qu'à quelques centimètres de ma peau.
(*'La Femme rompue'*, p. 242.)³⁴

After a conversation with Diana about Noëllie, a sort of 'character assassination', Monique imagines: 'Ça ressemblait à un envoûtement magique: là où on plante des épingles, la rivale sera mutilée, défigurée, et l'amant verra ses plaies hideuses' (p. 154). Cruel words are so many pins stuck in Noëllie's image/ effigy. Monique herself is identified with a bull pierced by banderillas (barbed darts): 'Avant d'en venir à un aveu complet, il m'a «fatiguée» comme on fatigue le taureau' (p. 184).³⁵ When she wakes from her nightmares she is broken, 'brisée' (p. 193).³⁶

³⁴ Poe, Edgar Allen, 'The Pit and the Pendulum', (first published in 'The Gift', 1843), in *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, new edn, London: Dent, 1993, pp. 239-53. (Translated into French by Charles Baudelaire as 'Le Puits et le Pendule' in *Nouvelles Histoires Extraordinaires, Oeuvres Complètes*, Paris: Louis Conard, 1933, pp. 117-38.)

³⁵ The role of the banderillero (bullfighter) is to tire the bull by thrusting banderillas (barbed darts) into its neck.

³⁶ These clusters of violent images that concretise mental suffering as physical pain intersect with clusters of images relating to the body (see later).

Violence and cruelty recur too in incidents of self harm that typify madness. Xavière's deliberate burning of herself in *L'Invitée* was discussed in the last chapter. Murielle pinches herself to make sure she exists (p. 111) and hits her head against the wall in a paroxysm of despair and anger: 'Ah! j'ai cogné trop fort je me suis fêlé le crâne c'est sur eux qu'il faut cogner. La tête contre les murs non non je ne deviendrai pas folle [...]' (p. 118). In related images, the 'double vision' of the woman in 'L'Age de discrétion' is presented as the result of a blow on the head, and in 'La Femme rompue' Monique's being trapped in her obsession, trying to understand why this is happening to her, is suggested in the image of her knocking her head against the walls of a dead-end (p. 223). Xavière escaped from the pain of her existence by smelling ether, Dominique in *Les Belles Images* and all the women protagonists in *La Femme rompue* abuse alcohol and/ or drugs. In all three books, violent, cruel imagery epitomises the acute suffering of madness.

As the woman protagonists in Simone de Beauvoir's fiction face madness and their personality disintegrates, they search hopelessly for a sense of who they are, a sense of identity. Images are closely related to the question of identity and the self. Mirrors/ images throw into question the distinction between the real and the imaginary and delusional. In *Les Belles Images*, as in *L'Invitée*, mirrors, reflections, images, and the gaze of others form a dense network of symbolisation. The text is a 'jeu de miroirs'. Laurence wonders: 'Derrière les images qui virevoltent dans les miroirs, qui se cache? Peut-être personne du tout' (p. 17). Images are associated with 'illusion' (p. 33), 'mirage' (p. 33), 'faux' (p. 108), 'mensonges' (p. 168), 'désillusions' (p. 168), and ultimately 'rien' as Laurence loses her sense of identity: 'Je n'étais pas une image; mais pas autre chose non plus: rien' (p. 170). Laurence's looking at herself in a mirror punctuates the text. In a bar with Lucien she observes herself: 'Dans la glace elle se jette

un coup d'oeil. Une jolie femme délicatement gaie, un peu capricieuse, un peu mystérieuse, c'est ainsi que Lucien me voit. Ça me plaisait. Pour Jean-Charles elle est efficace, loyale, limpide. C'est faux aussi. Agréable à regarder, oui. Mais beaucoup de femmes sont plus belles' (p. 108). Again when she is out shopping for Christmas presents with Jean-Charles:

Elle incline la tête pour qu'il puisse de nouveau assujettir le collier: parfaite image du couple qui s'adore encore après dix ans de mariage. Il achète la paix conjugale, les joies du foyer, l'entente l'amour; et la fierté de soi. Elle se contemple dans la glace.

— Mon chéri, tu as eu raison d'insister: je suis folle de joie.

(*Les Belles Images*, pp. 140-41.)

At the Christmas party, dancing with Dufrène, Laurence accepts his compliments but:

'Elle s'aperçoit dans une glace. [...] Elle se trouve quelconque' (p. 143). In the final lines of the novel, Laurence, in a way reminiscent of Françoise in *L'Invitée*, looks at herself in the mirror as she determines how she will go on: 'Laurence brosse ses cheveux, elle remet un peu d'ordre dans son visage. Pour moi les jeux sont faits, pense-t-elle en regardant son image — un peu pâle, les traits tirés. Mais les enfants auront leur chance' (p. 183). Laurence who until this point has lacked an inner conviction of who she is, has sought in her reflection the Laurence that others see in an attempt to find her self. In her final gesture, it is as though Laurence truly sees her/ self for the first time.

Others also act as mirrors throughout *Les Belles Images*. It is in their eyes that Laurence sees her image, her reflection and searches for her self. These mirrors can be false reflectors. She uses Lucien as a mirror: 'Et puis sous son regard elle se sent précieuse. Précieuse: elle se laisse avoir, elle aussi. On croit tenir à un homme: on tient à une certaine idée de soi, à une illusion de liberté, ou d'imprévu, à des mirages' (p. 33). Laurence's precarious sense of self means that she is easily unsettled by reflections of herself. Threatened by the intimacy his love holds out, the image of herself she finds in

Lucien's eyes is almost unbearable: 'Il la regarde avec ses yeux où brille d'un éclat presque insoutenable son image' (p. 61). It is as if Lucien looks too closely and sees too much. Similarly, Laurence is troubled by the honest gaze of her daughter Catherine, 'cet impitoyable regard des enfants qui ne jouent pas le jeu' (p. 29). She is afraid of what others will see in her and is especially aware of Brigitte's gaze: 'Debout devant moi, Brigitte m'examinait, sans effronterie, mais avec une franche curiosité. J'étais un peu gênée. Entre adultes, on ne se regarde pas vraiment. Ces yeux là me voyaient' (p. 53). Laurence is also unsettled by Mona's gaze; Laurence has shown her round her home and as she leaves, 'elle jette autour d'elle un dernier regard que Laurence déchiffre mal: en tout cas ce n'est pas de l'envie' (p. 70).

Dominique consults her mirror, the gaze of others, in desperation: 'Dominique s'approche du miroir. [...] Dans le miroir Laurence examine sa mère. La parfaite, l'idéale image d'une femme qui vieillit bien. Qui vieillit. Cette image-là, Dominique la refuse. Elle flanche, pour la première fois' (p. 16). She is horrified, panicked at the idea of ageing. And when Gilbert leaves her she tells Laurence: 'Même avec un nom une femme sans homme, c'est une demi-ratée, une espèce d'épave... Je vois bien comment les gens me regardent: crois-moi ce n'est plus du tout comme avant' (pp. 142-43). (One of her vivid childhood memories is of being stared at. She tells Laurence: 'Tu ne sais pas ce que c'est d'être toisée par des copines aux cheveux bien lavés [...] pp. 21-2.) At the end of the novel, Laurence appropriates the power of the gaze to which she has been subjected: 'Elle regarde [Jean-Charles], droit dans les yeux, il détourne la tête' (p. 182). Laurence has defeated Jean-Charles, her gaze signifies her triumph.

Image is opposed to real in the text. Laurence lives her life at a distance, with a sense of unreality, as if she were in a glossy photograph. This was true during her childhood and adolescence. It is also true in the present. Sitting at her desk at home in

the evening, she imagines herself and Jean-Charles are figures in an advertisement. The boundary between reality and image/ imagination becomes blurred, Laurence is observer and participant in the story line she invents (p. 21). 'Regard attentif du mari, joli sourire de la jeune femme. On lui a souvent dit qu'elle avait un joli sourire: elle le sent sur ses lèvres' (p. 22). Dominique made her into an image: 'Elle a toujours été une image. Dominique y a veillé [...]' (p. 21). Jean-Charles also reduces her and her daughters to an image: '[...] furieux si nous dérangeons l'image qu'il se fait de nous, petite fille, jeune femme exemplaires, se foutant de ce que nous sommes pour de bon' (p. 133). Early in the novel, Laurence identifies with Midas, the king whose touch turned everything, including his daughter, into gold: 'Tout ce qu'elle touche se change en image' (p. 21).³⁷ By the end of the novel, she finds the strength to refuse to bring up Catherine in the same way that she was brought up (p. 132) and tells Jean-Charles: 'Élever un enfant, ce n'est pas en faire une belle image...' (p. 182).

For all their association with the unreal, images are powerful, powerful even to the point of devastation. Laurence, prostrate in her room, 'térassée par une galopade d'images et de mots' (p. 179), determines, 'je récapitulerai ce voyage image par image, mot par mot' (p. 153). As she reviews the trip and events since her return, painful images threaten to engulf her. She remembers the family dinner when she felt excluded and alone:

Et de nouveau fond sur elle l'image qu'elle refoule avec le plus de violence, qui surgit dès que sa vigilance se relâche: Jean-Charles, papa, Dominique, souriant comme sur une affiche américaine vantant une marque de *oat-meal*. Réconciliés, s'abandonnant ensemble aux gaietés de la vie de famille.

(*Les Belles Images*, p. 175.)

³⁷ This recalls Élisabeth in *L'Invitée*: 'C'était un sort qui lui avait été jeté: elle changeait tout ce qu'elle touchait en carton-pâte' (p. 272).

This image crystallises for Laurence, her abandonment and utter isolation: 'Elle seule est différente; rejetée; incapable de vivre; incapable d'aimer' (p. 176). It is at this point in the text that she experiences a feeling of total collapse.

The imagery of mirrors, reflections and images that forms such a dense network in *Les Belles Images* is also found in *La Femme rompue*. In this collection too, these images encapsulate the women protagonists' unstable sense of self and the fragile boundary between reality and delusion. When the woman in 'L'Age de discrétion' wakes from heavy sleep, it is the reality around her that seems chimerical, dreamlike: it is 'l'envers illusoire et chatoyant du néant où j'avais plongé' (p. 57). It is as if she finds herself through the looking glass.³⁸ Reflections and echoes are connoted positively at first:

Reflets, échos, se renvoyant à l'infini: j'ai découvert la douceur d'avoir derrière moi un long passé. Je n'ai pas le temps de me le raconter, mais souvent à l'improviste je l'aperçois en transparence au fond du moment présent; il lui donne sa couleur, sa lumière comme les roches ou les sables se reflètent dans le chatolement de la mer.

(*'L'Age de discrétion'*, p.17.)

Later, the woman's optimism is replaced by disillusionment:

Je m'étais plus ou moins imaginé que ma vie, derrière moi, était un paysage dans lequel je pourrais me promener à ma guise, découvrant peu à peu ses méandres et ses replis. Non. [...] de loin en loin, ressuscitent des images mutilées, pâlies, aussi abstraites que celles de ma vieille histoire de France; elles se découpent arbitrairement, sur un fond blanc.

(*'L'Age de discrétion'*, p. 65.)

Transparency and movement give way to lifeless, two-dimensional pictures. In contrast, an image of Philippe is real and painful: 'Philippe... avec quelle douleur je le regrettais! J'écartais son image, elle me faisait venir les larmes aux yeux' (p. 64). Like Laurence, the woman can be hurt by images.

³⁸ See *L'Invitée*, p. 239. Françoise leaves her hospital room for the first time: 'c'était presque aussi étrange que de pénétrer à travers une glace' (p. 239).

In 'Monologue', Murielle is preoccupied with her image. She fantasises about writing her life story, telling the world 'la vérité la vraie',³⁹ and about how others would gripe 'en voyant [son] nom et [sa] photo dans les vitrines' (p. 90). She imagines her reconciliation with Tristan as a triumph: 'Je retournerai chez les couturiers je donnerai des soirées des cocktails on passera ma photo dans *Vogue* en grand décolleté mes seins ne craignent personne. «Tu as vu la photo de Murielle?» Ils seront salement baisés [...]' (p. 97). Murielle's image/ photo is one more weapon in her all consuming quest for revenge. She wants to be the woman in the pictures, to be seen to be rehabilitated. As it is, photos have the power to hurt her. At a harrowing point in Murielle's monologue, she is moved to tears by photos of her daughter whom she addresses directly:

J'ouvre l'album de photographies je regarde toutes les Sylvie! ce visage d'enfant un peu hagard ce visage secret d'adolescente. A la fille de dix-sept ans qu'on m'a assassinée je dis les yeux dans les yeux: «J'ai été la meilleure des mères. Tu m'aurais remerciée plus tard.»

(‘Monologue’, p. 114.)

Murielle's monologue itself acts as a distorting mirror where values are inverted and where Murielle attempts to construct a positive image of herself as the best mother in the world.

In 'La Femme rompue' Monique loses her sense of self and with it her image:

Un homme avait perdu son ombre. Je ne sais plus ce qui lui arrivait, mais c'était terrible. Moi, j'ai perdu mon image. Je ne la regardais pas souvent; mais, à l'arrière-plan elle était là, telle que Maurice l'avait peinte pour moi. [...] Il fait noir, je ne me vois plus.

(‘La Femme rompue’, p. 238.)

She has depended on Maurice to know who she is, just as Françoise in *L'Invitée* depends on Pierre.⁴⁰ Ostensibly cooperating with her psychiatrist but almost defiantly,

³⁹ An interesting echo of the words of Louise in *Les Belles images* when she is seeking reassurance that her sister loves her best: '—C'est vrai? c'est vraiment vrai?' (p. 81).

⁴⁰ Monique's experience converges with Françoise's in a number of respects. Both characters lose their sense of self and wonder who they are. Monique asks, 'est-ce que je sais qui je suis?' and loses her 'image'. Françoise concludes, 'je ne suis personne' and discovers that her face is 'un masque blanc' (p. 184), then, as her plight worsens, that 'elle avait cessé d'être quelqu'un; elle n'avait même plus de

Monique looks at herself in the mirror in an attempt to find herself: '«Collaborez», demande le docteur Marquet. Je veux bien. Je veux bien essayer de me retrouver. Je me suis planté devant la glace [...]’ (p. 240). Her action recalls Françoise’s and Laurence’s corresponding gestures. When Monique rereads old letters in an attempt to make sense of her relationship with Maurice, she becomes convinced that it is the memory of love that has replaced the real love they had; like an echo, the auditory equivalent of a reflection, memory has given things a ring not their own. And yet, Monique recalls, his smiles and looks had been no different. Her lament interrupts the text: ‘(Oh! si seulement je retrouvais ces regards et ces sourires!)’ (p. 224). In her delirium as her crisis deepens, it is as if reflections, echoes have become disembodied, free-floating:

Ces sourires, ces regards, ces mots ils ne peuvent pas avoir disparu. Ils flottent dans l’appartement. Les mots souvent je les entends. Une voix dit à mon oreille, très distinctement: «Ma petite, ma chérie, mon chéri...» Les regards, les sourires, il faut les attraper au vol, les poser par surprise sur le visage de Maurice, et alors tout serait comme avant.

(‘La Femme rompue’, p. 237.)

In summary, in all the texts, images, reflections and echoes figure the frail line that divides the real and the illusory and the fragility of the women’s sense of self. Closely related to them are clusters of images of the body.

My starting point is that the body is a metaphor for the self and is intimately tied up with questions of identity. We project our selves onto our bodies. In *L’Invitée*, the body is a site of pain; as we have seen, Françoise’s physical pain and emotional pain are conflated and evoked by images of tearing, burning, biting and stabbing. The body is manifestly a site of pain in *Les Belles Images* and *La Femme rompue* too.⁴¹ The body is

figure’ (p. 216). Both characters wonder what others see when they look at them. In a moving moment in *L’Invitée*, Françoise looks to Pierre to find herself but he is looking not at Françoise but at Xavière. The paragraph break marks the blow: ‘Elle tourna les yeux vers Pierre, mais Pierre ne la regardait pas./ Il regardait Xavière [...]’ (p. 184).

⁴¹ It is apposite that clusters of images of the body in each text be examined in this section of my chapter as they are related to questions of identity and overlap with images of mirrors and reflections. Clearly, they also intersect with clusters of images that evoke cruelty and violence (see above).

of central importance in all three books and it is true to say that the texts inscribe the body. It is a key element of their imagery, their symbolic framework. *Les Belles Images* stands out from the other texts insofar as it incorporates a cluster of positive images related to the body. The body can express pleasure and through pleasure connect Laurence with her self, the real. When she first knew Jean-Charles: 'Soudain, un soir, au retour d'une promenade, dans la voiture arrêtée, sa bouche sur ma bouche, cet embrassement, ce vertige. Alors, pendant des jours et des semaines, je n'ai plus été une image, mais chair et sang, désir, plaisir' (p. 22). She experienced the same powerful feelings in the early days of her relationship with Lucien: 'De nouveau, il y a dix-huit mois, avec Lucien; le feu dans mes veines, et dans mes os cette exquise déliquescence' (p. 22). The notions/ lexis associated with loss of self ('vertige', 'feu', 'déliquescence') reappear here. It seems as though in these boundary softening moments, Laurence experienced a fleeting fulfilment of her desire for oneness, a sense of oneness she had known with her father. Indeed, she begins to make the connection, though the idea is not pursued: 'Et j'ai retrouvé aussi cette douceur plus secrète que j'avais connue jadis, assise aux pieds de mon père ou tenant sa main dans la mienne...' (p. 22). (Ultimately, Laurence is threatened by the intimacy that Lucien offers her. It holds out the promise of repossessing a lost closeness but is experienced by Laurence as engulfing, like an overpowering perfume in a closed bedroom: 'la voix nostalgique [de Lucien] fait lever en elle comme un echo brouillé de quelque chose vécu jadis, dans une autre vie, ou peut-être en ce moment sur une autre planète. C'est insinuant et pernicieux comme un parfum, la nuit, dans une chambre fermée — un parfum de narcisses' (p. 60).) Although Laurence complains that love making has become 'lisse, hygiénique, routinier' (p. 27), she continues to enjoy sex with Jean-Charles. At Feuverolles, Laurence goes up to their room to wait for him to join her:

Dans un instant Jean-Charles sera là: elle ne veut plus penser qu'à lui, à son profil éclairé par la lueur dansante des flammes. Et soudain il est là, il la prend dans ses bras, et la tendresse devient dans les veines de Laurence une coulée brûlante, elle chavire de désir tandis que leurs lèvres se joignent.

(*Les Belles Images*, p. 101.)

The way images foreground movement and light, flames and burning is striking.

More frequently the body is a source or expression of pain. As Elizabeth Fallaize so aptly puts it, 'repression leads [...] to the inscription of [Laurence's] feelings in her body',⁴² thus, as for Barthes, the body here is a text. Pain is associated with hardness and tightness, as it is in *L'Invitée*. And as in *L'Invitée*, the throat is a recurring motif. Pain is also concentrated in Laurence's chest for emotion stops her breathing.⁴³ When she leaves Dominique, who has learned that Gilbert is going to leave her and who is terribly distressed, she can find no compassion for her mother: 'Quelque chose se convulse dans sa poitrine et l'empêche de respirer' (p. 52).⁴⁴ We have already considered the violent image: 'L'horreur prend Laurence à la gorge' (p. 124). Laurence is distressed when Jean-Charles discusses Catherine during a family dinner: 'La gorge de Laurence se contracte. [...] Une sorte de honte l'étouffe [...]' (p. 173). Laurence is a woman 'avec des pierres dans la poitrine' (p. 122); as her crisis reaches its climax 'son corps est de pierre' (p. 176). But it is on eating, or rather the rejection of food and vomiting, that the text focuses. These take on explicit symbolic significance as the text progresses. Lack of appetite develops into an inability to eat and then a rejection of food and through this a rejection of her world and her self. Laurence's upset is centered in her

⁴² Fallaize, *The Novels*, p. 135.

⁴³ The suffocation motif in Simone de Beauvoir's fiction, recalls her words in the preface she wrote to Violette Leduc's *La Bâtarde*, Paris: Gallimard, 1964. She says of Leduc's texts that they might all be called *L'Asphyxie*: 'C'est le symbole d'un confinement plus profond: elle s'étiole dans sa peau' (p. 18).

⁴⁴ It is not always the case that Laurence remains detached from her mother's suffering. See p. 115: 'Laurence a un élan vers [Dominique]'. She tries to comfort her, calling her 'Dominique chérie'. It is true that Laurence never calls Dominique 'mother' and that she shies away from physical contact with her (see pp. 52 and 124-25), yet I cannot agree with Brosman who asserts that Laurence thinks of Dominique as a stranger. *Simone de Beauvoir Revisited*, p. 89.

stomach. After meeting Gilbert and learning that he is about to reject Dominique, 'Elle est en sueur soudain, elle a envie de vomir' (p. 48). The following weekend 'Laurence a l'appétit coupé' (p. 98). When she was afraid that Lucien might leave her: 'C'était plutôt sordide: la bouche pâteuse, des envies de vomir' (p. 65). When she learns that Dominique has written to Gilbert's new partner, Patricia, telling her about her mother's affair with Gilbert: 'un spasme lui déchire l'estomac, elle vomit tout le thé qu'elle vient d'absorber; ça ne lui était pas arrivée depuis des années, de vomir d'émotion. L'estomac vide, des spasmes lui tordent encore' (p. 121). After her quarrel with Jean-Charles '(elle a dit qu'elle avait mangé avec les enfants, elle ne pouvait rien avaler)' (p. 137). It is after the trip to Greece that Laurence's anorexia is exacerbated. It is related to her powerlessness. During the dinner when Catherine is discussed and when no one, not even her father, supports her, 'Laurence s'est obligée à manger, mais c'est alors qu'elle a eu le premier spasme. Elle se savait vaincue' (p. 175). Three days later, Laurence learns that her father and mother are going to live together again: 'Le soir elle avait vomi son dîner; elle ne s'était pas levée le lendemain; ni le jour suivant [...]' (p. 179). Prostrate, in her darkened room, Laurence confronts her pain, going back over the trip to Greece, 'image par image, mot par mot' (p. 153). Her body is the site of her pain: 'Je n'ai pas de mots pour me plaindre ou pour regretter. Mais ce noeud dans ma gorge m'empêche de manger' (p. 153). Emotional pain is reified. When she remembers Brigitte and the friendship her entourage seems determined to deprive Catherine of, 'le noeud se resserre dans [sa] gorge' (p. 172). She repeats the accepted wisdom that she will soon get over it, but at the idea that Catherine will not be allowed to spend Easter with her friend, she contradicts this analysis:

Donc à Pâques — elle sera guérie, bien sûr, c'est l'affaire de quelques jours, on se dégoûte de manger pendant quelques jours et forcément ça finit par se tasser — ils emmèneront Catherine à Rome. L'estomac de Laurence se crispe. Elle ne pourra peut-être pas manger avant longtemps.

(*Les Belles Images*, p. 175.)

Laurence seems to derive some satisfaction from the idea that she may not be able to eat for some time. Her passivity is conspicuous. Her sister, Marthe, interrupts Laurence's thoughts and persuades her to try to eat some soup ('un bouillon'), she has made:

Pour leur faire plaisir Laurence l'avale. Deux jours qu'elle n'a pas mangé. Et après? puisqu'elle n'a pas faim. Leurs regards inquiets. Elle a vidé la tasse, et son coeur se met à battre, elle se couvre de sueur. Juste le temps de se précipiter à la salle de bains et de vomir; comme avant-hier et le jour d'avant. Quel soulagement! Elle voudrait se vider plus entièrement encore, se vomir tout entière. Elle se rince la bouche, se jette sur son lit épuisée, calmée. [...] Maintenant qu'elle a vomi elle se sent bien.

(*Les Belles Images*, pp. 168-69.)

Laurence's vomiting signifies a rejection of her self; she is emptying herself, ejecting her self.⁴⁵ Moreover, her repeated denials that she is making herself ill deliberately, her rejection of the idea that not eating may be a way for her to resist, do not ring true.⁴⁶ She comes to see her refusal to eat as an expression of her revolt; she refuses to see the doctor, to be manipulated: 'Ils la forceront à manger, ils lui feront tout avaler; tout quoi? tout ce qu'elle vomit, sa vie, celle des autres avec leurs fausses amours, leurs histoires d'argent, leurs mensonges. Ils la guériront de ses refus, de son désespoir' (p. 180). Her vomiting expresses metaphorically her rejection of the life she leads, a rejection of the world in which she lives. Laurence does not want Catherine to suffer the same fate as herself: 'Qu'a-t-on fait de moi? Cette femme qui n'aime personne, insensible aux beautés du monde, incapable même de pleurer, cette femme que je vomis' (p. 181).⁴⁷ She tells

⁴⁵ Laurence's refusal to eat does not appear to be an instance of anorexia nervosa which is characterised by a refusal to maintain a normal body weight and a distortion in the perception of body shape and size (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fourth ed., Washington DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1994, p. 539). For an interesting discussion of anorexia nervosa and gender, see Evans, *Fits and Starts*, pp. 229-33.

⁴⁶ See *Les Belles images*, pp. 170 and 175.

⁴⁷ Laurence echoes Élisabeth in *L'Invitée* here. Élisabeth tells Françoise '[Claude] s' imagine qu'il peut me faire tout avaler' (p. 58).

Jean-Charles: 'Je ne veux pas de médecin. C'est vous qui me rendez malade, et je me guérirai toute seule parce que je ne vous céderai pas' (p. 181).

In 'L'Age de discrétion' too, emotional pain is inscribed in the woman's body. The terms used to describe her pain are hyperbolic. After her quarrel on the phone with Philippe, 'je me suis assise, en sueur, tremblante, les jambes brisées' (p. 35). The suffocation motif, so common in *L'Invitée* and present in *Les Belles Images*, reappears here. The woman writes: 'Toute la nuit la rancune m'a étouffée' (p. 37). Her emotional upset/ bitterness against André is expressed metaphorically as a physical illness, reminding of Françoise's illness in *L'Invitée*: 'A chaque seconde, évoquant son visage, sa voix, j'attisais une rancune qui me dévastait. Comme dans ces maladies où on forge sa propre souffrance, chaque inspiration vous déchirant les poumons, et cependant vous êtes obligé de respirer' (p. 41). Pain makes her body stiff and hard. When André suggests they talk things through she refuses: 'Cette colère, cette douleur, ce raidissement de mon coeur, les mots s'y briseraient' (p. 42). Her body contracts, is paralysed: 'Le visage d'André, sa voix; le même, un autre, aimé, haï, cette contradiction descendait dans mon corps; mes nerfs, mes muscles se contractaient dans une espèce de tétanos' (p. 44).⁴⁸ Her pain is 'cette barre de fer dans [sa] poitrine' (p. 45).

In 'La Femme rompue' the body is present in the symbolism of the text in a more muted way. Nevertheless, powerful emotion is still linked with painful difficulty in breathing. When Monique finds out about Maurice's seeing Noëllie, her anger wakes her early and she leaves the flat, obsessed by the words 'il m'a menti': 'Je ne voulais pas souffrir, je ne souffrais pas, mais la rancune me suffoquait: «Il m'a menti!»' (p. 133). In a way similar to the other women protagonists' but far more understated, Monique's

⁴⁸ The reconciliation is presented as a loosening: 'de nouveau nous pouvions nous parler et quelque chose s'est dénoué en moi' (p. 79).

emotional pain is represented metaphorically as physical pain. During a weekend away with Maurice, Monique says: 'j'ai senti au coeur quelque chose d'aigu: un bonheur douloureux tant il est devenu insolite' (p. 161). Even happiness is painful. Like Laurence, Monique suffers from loss of appetite: 'Parfois j'avale un toast, pour avoir la paix. Mais les bouchées ne passent pas' (p. 193. '*Dimanche 6 décembre.*'). Her weight loss is emblematic of her suffering (Diana: 'Oh! comme vous avez maigri!' p. 233). Not until months later does Monique note in her diary, 'j'arrive à manger un peu' (p. 239. '*23 février*'). More foregrounded in the text is Monique's constant bleeding that lasts some twenty-three days. The bleeding is noted in a restrained tone, gathering its symbolic power from reiteration: 'J'ai recommencé à saigner ce matin, quinze jours plus tôt que je ne l'aurais dû' (p. 233. '*31 janvier.*'). It is a metaphor for her loss of self, analogous to Laurence's vomiting: 'Je continue à saigner. Si ma vie pouvait s'échapper de moi sans que j'aie le moindre effort à faire pour ça!' (p. 235. '*6 février, puis sans date.*'); 'Je continue à saigner. J'ai peur' (p. 237). Monique's self is seeping away. Not until the diary entry for the twenty-third of February do we read: 'L'hémorragie s'est arrêtée' (p. 239).⁴⁹

In 'Monologue', the body is an expression of Murielle's hurt, the site where she projects her anger and disappointment. And for Murielle, the body equates with perverted sexuality. Murielle's monologue returns obsessively to images of sex. Sex is consistently associated with dirt and disgust. The text is as much an instance of coprophilia (morbid pleasure in dung/ filth), as a case of coprolalia (obsessive use of obscene language). 'Monologue' is shocking for the obscenity and violence of its language. The whole text is hyperbolic, excessive. It confutes Murielle's claim to have

⁴⁹ This metaphor of bleeding as loss of self is taken up and developed by Marie Cardinal in *Les Mots pour le dire*, Paris: Grasset, 1975. Her heroine's bleeding stops as she rebuilds her personality/ self in psychotherapy.

renounced sex: 'Ça ne m'intéresse plus je suis barrée je ne pense plus jamais à ces choses là pas même en rêve' (p. 105). Sex permeates the story. Murielle sees sex everywhere. One of her earliest childhood memories is filtered through the sordid lens that distorts all Murielle's perceptions; she remembers one fourteenth of July: 'Papa perchait Nanard sur son épaule pour qu'il voie le feu d'artifice et moi la grande je restais par terre pressée entre leurs corps juste à la hauteur de leur sexe dans l'odeur de sexe de cette foule en chaleur [...]' (p. 88). Sex is animal. Murielle is deprived of the light/ joy/ excitement that her brother is lifted up to see. Murielle's disgust is focused on her mother. She accuses her of incest with Nanard: 'Elle le prenait dans son lit le matin je les entendait se chatouiller [...] elle se baladait à travers son bordel de chambre à moitié à poil dans son peignoir de soie blanche taché et troué de brûlures de cigarettes il se collait à ses cuisses' (pp. 88-9); 'quand elle faisait semblant de se doucher c'était pour montrer son cul à Nanard. Son fils son gendre: ça donne envie de dégobiller' (p. 106). Murielle is also convinced that her mother seduced Murielle's first husband and manipulated her into marrying him: 'elle assurait ses plaisirs et mon malheur' (p. 105). She visualises the sex act in violent terms, preoccupied by animality and filth:

C'est elle qui l'a harponné au cours de gymnastique et elle se l'est envoyé crado comme elle était ça n'avait rien de ragoûtant de se la farcir mais avec les hommes qui lui étaient passés sur le corps elle devait en connaître des trucs et des machins c'était le genre à se mettre à cheval sur le mec je la vois d'ici c'est tellement dégueux la façon dont les bonnes femmes baisent.

(*'Monologue'*, p. 105.)

Murielle is reluctant to name the female genitalia although she might have chosen from an available repertoire of obscene terms. Instead, they figure as an empty space, a filthy gap: 'Cette momie ça donne le frisson d'imaginer son entrejambes elle dégouline de parfums mais par en dessous elle sent [...] elle ne se lavait pas [...]' (pp. 105-6). The term 'momie' adds overtones of putrefaction. The same emphasis on animality and filth

recurs in Murielle's recollection of Albert's infidelity: 'Il dansait avec Nina sexe à sexe elle étalait ses gros seins elle puait le parfum mais on sentait en dessous une odeur de bidet et lui qui trémoussait il bandait comme un cerf' (p. 91). Such is Murielle's obsession, the past is reenacted in the present as she imagines the scene in the party in the flat upstairs:

Je les vois d'ici c'est trop dégueux ils se frottent l'un contre l'autre sexe à sexe ça les fait mouiller les bonnes femmes elles se rengorgent parce que le type a la queue en l'air. Et chacun se prépare à cocufier son meilleur ami sa très chère amie ils le feront cette nuit même dans la salle de bains même pas allongés la robe retroussée sur les fesses suantes quand on ira pisser on marchera dans le foudre comme chez Rose la nuit de mon éclat.

('Monologue', p.91.)

Murielle's hurt and sense of betrayal is evident in her bitter irony, 'sa très chère amie'. In Murielle's delusion, Sylvie's suicide must also be linked in some way to what she defines as perverted sex. She suspects Sylvie of having a sexual relationship with her teacher, a woman,⁵⁰ conjectures that she may have been pregnant or that 'elle était tombée dans les pattes d'une gouine ou sur une bande de débauchés quelqu'un abusait d'elle [...] ' (p. 113). For Murielle, the 'sale histoire' behind the suicide can only be sex.

Murielle's need to sleep and the fact that she must take her sleeping drug in suppository form make up a constant refrain in the story. The images used to express this are sexual and obscene. She accuses the doctor of sadism: 'Je ne peux pas me bourrer comme un canon' (p. 88). This is an appropriation and reversal of a phallic image.

Murielle's obsessive thoughts of sex are matched by her equally obsessive fears of contamination, abhorrence of dirt associated with physicality. She affirms her purity in the face of accusations that she herself is corrupt: 'ignoble' (p. 89); '«Tu as de la boue dans la tête.»' (p. 106); 'Ils me couvraient de boue [...] ' (p. 114). Risks of

⁵⁰ See 'Monologue', *La Femme rompue*, pp. 98 and, especially, 113.

contamination, infection are everywhere; Murielle's thoughts slip naturally from being sickened to being sick:

Ils me rendent malade j'ai la bouche pâteuse et ça m'épouvante ces deux petits boutons sur ma cuisse. Je fais attention je ne mange que des produits de régime mais il y a tout de même des gens qui tripotent avec des mains plus ou moins propres ça n'existe pas l'hygiène sur cette terre l'air est pollué pas seulement à cause des autos et des usines mais à cause de ces millions de bouches sales qui l'avalent et le recrachent du matin au soir; quand je pense que je baigne dans leur haleine j'ai envie de fuir au fond du désert; comment se garder un corps propre dans un monde aussi dégueux on est contaminé par tous les pores de la peau et pourtant j'étais saine nette je ne veux pas qu'ils m'infectent.

(*'Monologue'*, p. 95.)

She refuses to travel: 'Des draps douteux des nappes sales dormir dans la sueur des autres dans leur crasse manger avec des couverts mal lavés il y a de quoi attraper des morpions ou la vérole et les odeurs me font vomir' (p. 107). The picturesque is sordid: 'de la crasse qui pue du linge sale des trognons de chou' (p. 107). Excrement is the ultimate foulness that preoccupies Murielle: she pictures her corpse covered in faeces (p. 96); she tells others that 'ils pataugent dans la merde' (p. 106); 'les femmes c'est toutes des fumiers' (p. 106); it is an obstacle to her being away from home: 'je me constipe à mort parce que les chiottes où tout le monde chie ça me bloque net; la fraternité de la merde très peu pour moi' (p. 107). Her obsession with contamination is all encompassing: 'Si j'étais la terre ça me dégoûterait toute cette vermine sur mon dos je la secouerais' (p. 103). It is not surprising that Murielle's fixation should be accompanied by compulsive cleaning. She is concerned that Tristan and Francis will mess up her lounge during their visit (p. 92) and her thoughts return automatically to her obsession: 'je descendrai acheter des petits fours que Francis écrasera sur la moquette il cassera un de mes bibelots il n'est pas dressé cet enfant et maladroit comme son père qui fouta de la cendre partout [...]' (p. 101). For Murielle, the cleanliness of her flat is the outward sign of the inner purity she pretends to: 'Il est impeccable en ce moment ce salon net

lustré brillant comme la lune d'autrefois' (p. 101). She and her flat are identified with the former untaintedness of the moon.

Clusters of images relating to ageing bodies can be found in all the texts under consideration. In Simone de Beauvoir's fiction, ageing bodies are connoted negatively, associated with distaste and even repulsion/ disgust. This is particularly the case when it comes to sexuality.⁵¹ In *L'Invitée*, Dominique faces old age with dread. She studies her mirror for signs of ageing, disturbed by the deterioration she sees around her eyes and on her neck (p. 16). Her neck acquires symbolic weight in the text. Faced with Gilbert's rejection and the news that he is to marry a twenty year old, Dominique becomes hysterical: 'Elle éclate de rire, la tête renversée en arrière, appuyée contre le dossier du fauteuil; elle rit, elle rit, l'oeil fixe, toute blanche, et sous la peau du cou de grosses cordes saillent, c'est soudain un cou de très vieille femme' (p. 114). Dominique's neck condenses her age and everything that means. It is a motif repeated when Laurence goes to her mother after Gilbert's physical abuse, when 'comme l'autre jour, la tête renversée en arrière, les yeux au plafond, des sanglots gonflent son cou aux cordes raidies' (p. 123). The idea of growing old alone horrifies her: 'Vieille et seule: c'est atroce' (p. 115). It is a theme that is developed in 'L'Age de discrétion' and 'La Femme rompue'. The women protagonists' relationship with their ageing bodies is problematical. The woman in 'L'Age de discrétion' acknowledges that she no longer has the same easy relationship with her body, and is seemingly untroubled by this:

Et voilà! Moins je me reconnais dans mon corps, plus je me sens obligée de m'en occuper. Il est à ma charge et je le soigne avec un dévouement ennuyé, comme un vieil ami un peu disgracié, un peu diminué qui aurait besoin de moi.

(*'L'Age de discrétion'*, p. 21.)

⁵¹ In her very stimulating article 'Transgressing the (In)cont(in)ent Boundaries: The Body in Decline' (*Yale French Studies*, 72, 1986 pp. 181-200), Elaine Marks argues that, in Simone de Beauvoir's writing, 'sexuality emerges through discourses on ag[e]ing and that the uncontrollable body in decline is a body manifesting its sexuality' (p. 183).

Her attitude to sex is ambivalent; she appears to despise Irène for being 'capable de déchaînements' but is forced to reassess her own situation: 'La sexualité pour moi n'existe plus. J'appelais sérénité cette indifférence; soudain je l'ai comprise autrement: c'est une infirmité, c'est la perte d'un sens; elle me rend aveugle aux besoins, aux douleurs, aux joies de ceux qui le possèdent' (p. 27). When they quarrel over Philippe, the fact that she and André no longer have a sexual relationship proves to be a further obstacle to their making up: '[...] jadis nous avions au lit des réconciliations fougueuses; dans le désir, le trouble, le plaisir, les griefs oiseux étaient calcinés; nous nous retrouvions en face l'un de l'autre, neufs et joyeux. Maintenant nous étions privés de ce recours' (p. 48). Alone in Paris, the woman begins to reassess what growing old means to her. She has always been flattered when people told her how young she was; now she sees it as a double edged compliment, 'qui annonce de pénibles lendemains': 'Je ne suis pas jeune, je suis bien conservée, c'est très différent. Bien conservée, et peut-être finie' (p. 62).⁵² The revelation that she is old is devastating: 'Inutile. Les Grecs appelaient leurs vieillards des frelons. «Inutile frelon», se dit Hécube dans *Les Troyennes*. Il s'agit de moi. J'étais foudroyée' (p. 63). When the woman joins André in Villeneuve, her awareness of her body is transformed; she follows André fearfully, hesitatingly down the slope to the pool where he swims; she declines to swim, reluctant to expose her 'old woman's body' even to André; and when it comes to climbing back up the slope in intense heat, she struggles to catch her breath and make her legs obey her. Alone in her room later, she revises her position:

J'avais dit à André: «je ne vois pas ce qu'on perd à vieillir.» Eh bien! maintenant, je voyais. J'ai toujours refusé d'envisager la vie à la manière de Fitzgerald comme «un processus de dégradation». [...] Mon corps, je ne m'en inquiétais pas. [...] Quelle illusion! [...] Mon corps me lâchait. [...] [La dégringolade] était amorcé. Et maintenant, ce serait très rapide et très lent: nous allions devenir de grands vieillards.

⁵² In *L'Invitée*, the notion of well preserved women has pejorative overtones. See p. 176.

In 'Monologue', Murielle's disgust at sexuality which is focussed on her mother is magnified by her mother's age. Murielle believes, in line with popular prejudice, that no one should indulge in sex after fifty. She imagines her mother may have gigolos and finds the idea of her making love repugnant.⁵³ She is repelled at the idea of her mother's body: 'Cette momie ça donne le frisson d'imaginer son entre-jambes [...]' (p. 105).

According to Murielle's demented logic, her mother's age was related to the fact that she had to palm her lover off on Murielle: 'Elle était trop vioque pour le garder elle s'est servie de moi ils ricanaient dans mon dos [...]' (p. 105).

Monique is aware that her body is ageing but is not unduly concerned. She remembers an incident that happened on the beach in Greece two years earlier. Maurice had told her: '«Achète-toi donc un maillot d'une pièce.» Je sais, je savais: un peu de cellulite sur les cuisses, le ventre plus tout à fait plat. Mais je pensais qu'il s'en fichait' (p. 191). He defended the right of older women to feel the sun and fresh air on their bodies and Monique felt that what she was doing did not bother anyone; she did not buy the one piece swim suit! She is shocked but also somewhat detached/ indifferent when she sees herself in the mirror some months later: '[...] que je suis laide! que mon corps est disgracieux! Sur mes photos d'il y a deux ans, je me trouve plaisante. Sur celles de l'an dernier je n'ai pas l'air si mal, mais ce sont des photos d'amateur. Est-ce le malheur de ces cinq mois qui m'a changée? Ou ai-je commencé à dégringoler depuis longtemps déjà?' (p. 240). Monique encounters images of her ageing body as she might encounter a stranger, or, as the woman in 'L'Age de discrétion' says, 'comme un vieil ami un peu disgracié' (p. 21).

⁵³ Dominique in *Les Belles images* believes she is suspected of having gigolos (p. 178).

In summary, the body informs all the texts. A metaphor for the self, the body is generally a site of pain where the mental and emotional suffering of madness are reified. Physical symptoms are badges/ tokens of disintegration and loss of self. Ageing bodies in the later fiction can exemplify this process. Body imagery is hyperbolic in keeping with the intensity of the women protagonists' distress.

The texture of all the books is sombre. Imagery of pain and distress forms the dense weave of the texts. Yet running through them, in the weave, is a thread of poignant imagery. These images are the evocation of something lost, of a fleeting moment of joy or of something out of reach and their effect is poignant. They provide the measure of the characters' present unhappiness. Light and water are common motifs. Françoise experiences an unexpected sense of oneness with Xavière in a dance club:

Et brusquement, Françoise se trouva comblée, elle aussi; elle n'était plus rien, qu'une femme noyée dans une foule, une minuscule parcelle du monde, et toute entière tendue vers cette infime paillette blonde dont elle n'était même pas capable de se saisir; mais dans cette abjection où elle était tombée, voilà que lui était donné ce qu'elle avait souhaité en vain six mois plus tôt, au sein du bonheur: cette musique, ces visages, ces lumières se changeaient en regret, en attente, en amour, ils se confondaient avec elle et donnaient un sens irremplaçable à chaque battement de son coeur. Son bonheur avait éclaté, mais il retombait tout autour d'elle en une pluie d'instantanés passionnés.

(*L'Invitée*, p. 314.)

Françoise experiences a boundary softening moment that deepens rather than threatens her sense of self. It is a fleeting fulfilment of her desire for oneness. Light and water figure prominently. The glittering sequin that represents the promise that Xavière holds for Françoise is matched by the shards of glass, the metaphor for Françoise's shattered happiness, catching the light as they fall like raindrops, beautiful but with the power to wound. The moment is brief. Françoise would like to hold on to it but does not know how. (The idea of separating from Xavière fills her with anxiety. Back in Xavière's hotel room their leave-taking is awkward: '— Je vais vous laisser, dit Françoise. Elle se

leva, sa gorge était serrée, mais il n'y avait rien d'autre à faire: elle n'avait rien su faire d'autre' (p. 316). As she reaches the door she impulsively takes Xavière into her arms in what she comes to think of as 'un geste de tendresse inutile'.)

In *Les Belles Images* Laurence has an experience similar to Françoise's. She feels an unexpected sense of oneness on a balcony, high up, overlooking Paris:

Laurence s'immobilise; le temps soudain s'est arrêté. Derrière ce paysage concerté, avec routes, ses grands ensembles, ses lotissements, les voitures qui se hâtent, quelque chose transparaît, dont la rencontre est si émouvante qu'elle oublie les soucis, les intrigues, tout: elle n'est plus qu'une attente sans commencement ni fin. L'oiseau chante, invisible, annonçant le lointain renouveau. Une roseur traîne à l'horizon et Laurence reste un long moment paralysée par un emoi mystérieux.
(*Les Belles Images*, p.126.)

Characteristically, positive moments in the later fiction are encountered when protagonists find themselves in an elevated position. Positive images in *Les Belles Images* are generally associated with Laurence's childhood.⁵⁴ Light is a dominant motif. As Laurence, Jean-Charles and the children drive away from Feuverolles one evening, Laurence experiences a sense of well-being: 'Une odeur de feuilles mortes entre par la fenêtre ouverte; les étoiles brillent dans un ciel d'enfance et Laurence se sent soudain tout à fait bien' (p. 19). The smell of dead leaves is evocative, adding to the nostalgia evinced. Colour, light and movement are combined in an image of a kaleidoscope ('un cylindre de carton, cerclé de rayures brillantes, qui ressemble à un sucre de pomme géant'), that excites a childlike sense of wonderment and pleasure in Laurence: 'enchantement des couleurs et des formes qui se font, se défont, papillotent et se multiplient dans la fuyante symétrie d'un octogone' (p. 37). When Laurence goes into Louise's bedroom and finds her drawing at her desk, childhood is exemplified in a

⁵⁴ I have read with interest Tilde A. Sankovitch's work on Simone de Beauvoir's memoirs. In the chapter on Simone de Beauvoir, entitled 'The Giant, the Scapegoat, the Quester', she examines the myths that inform her autobiographical writing. The myth of the quester she identifies is the 'desire to recapture childhood and its innocence'. *French Women Writers and the Book: Myths of Access and Desire*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1988, pp. 101-21 (p. 117).

poignant recollection: 'La pièce sombre, avec juste une petite lampe allumée, les crayons de couleur, derrière moi une longue journée pailletée de petits plaisirs, et le monde dehors, immense et mystérieux' (pp. 56-57). The motifs of light and colour are found once more. And minor delights typified as glittering sequins recalls Françoise's anticipation of joy in *L'Invitée*. Light expresses Laurence's pleasure when her father suggests they go on holiday together: 'La joie comme un feu d'artifice' (p. 152). 'Cette explosion de joie [...]' (p. 153). His invitation is like Laurence's dream come true; she is afraid it is 'trop beau...' (p. 152). The trip holds out the promise of finding again a lost intimacy/ oneness with her father. The fact that he promises not to change his mind 'comme quand elle était petite' (p. 152) is suggestive. At first during the trip Laurence does know unity but then comes separation and loss. Laurence has a feeling of well-being as the plane leaves Paris:

L'avion pique brutalement vers le ciel, je l'entends crever les murs de ma prison: mon étroite vie cernée par des millions d'autres, dont j'ignore tout. Les grands ensembles et les petites maisons s'effacent, je survole toutes les clôtures, sauvée de la pesanteur; au-dessus de ma tête s'éploie l'espace infiniment bleu, sous mes pieds s'étalent de blancs paysages qui m'éblouissent et qui n'existent pas. Je suis ailleurs: nulle part et partout.

(*Les Belles Images*, p. 154.)

The image evokes her sense of space and her momentary loss of boundaries, her experience of unity/ oneness. Her regression is suggested by her enjoyment of imaginary landscapes formed by the clouds. This regression is underlined in Laurence's account of the early days of the trip. She delights in her dependence on her father: '[...] et papa traduisait les caractères inscrits au fronton des bâtiments: entrée, sortie, poste. J'aimais retrouver devant cet alphabet le mystère enfantin du langage et que, comme autrefois, le sens des mots et des choses me vînt par lui' (p. 154). She is filled with a sense of wholeness and congruity:

Sur la place qui a l'air d'une immense terrasse de café papa a commandé pour moi une boisson à la cerise, fraîche, légère, aigrette, délicieusement puérile. Et j'ai su

ce que voulait dire ce mot qu'on lit dans les livres: bonheur. [...] cet accord d'un ciel bleu et d'un goût fruité, avec le passé et le présent rassemblés dans un visage cher et cette paix en moi, je l'ignorais — sauf à travers de très vieux souvenirs. le bonheur: comme une raison que la vie se donne à elle-même.

(*Les Belles Images*, p. 155.)

However, Laurence cannot maintain this symbiotic/ regressed position. Her critical sense asserts itself and she must face separation and anguish.

For Murielle in 'Monologue', happiness is situated firmly in the past when her father was alive and she was his favourite, his 'sacrée petite bonne femme' (p. 88). She has never recovered from this first loss: 'Mon père m'aimait. Personne d'autre. Tout est venu de là' (p. 90). Happiness is out of reach for Murielle. She was deprived of the light/ joy of the fireworks. Whilst her brother was lifted high to see the light, she was trapped on the ground, closed in by 'cette foule en chaleur' (p. 88). The lost purity and innocence of that time is symbolised by the moon, now soiled and trampled underfoot.⁵⁵ In a perversion of the images of plenitude/ unity experienced by Laurence and the other women protagonists in *La Femme rompue*, Murielle's 'happy' vision is looking down on those whom she holds responsible for her plight, moaning as they roast in hell.

Two of the happiest moments in 'L'Age de discrétion' (which recall Laurence's experience on the restaurant balcony) occur when the woman stands on the balcony of her flat to gaze at the view. Her appreciation of what she sees is childlike:

Je suis restée un long moment sur le balcon. De mon sixième, je découvre un grand morceau de Paris, l'envol des pigeons au-dessus des toits d'ardoise, et ces faux pots de fleurs qui sont des cheminées. Rouge ou jaunes, des grues — cinq, neuf, dix, j'en compte dix — barrent le ciel de leurs bras de fer; à droite, mon regard se heurte à une haute muraille percée de petits trous [...].

('L'Age de discrétion', p. 11.)

⁵⁵ Anne Ophir suggests that Murielle adopts the moon as a 'feu d'artifice-ersatz' and traces the moon-fireworks link. *Regards féminins*, p. 49.

Note how chimneys are flower pots, the counting out loud of the primary coloured cranes that are humanised, the literalness of the wall with little holes. The effect is repeated several pages later: '[...] je suis encore restée un long moment sur le balcon.

J'ai regardé tourner sur le fond bleu du ciel une grue couleur de minium. J'ai suivi des yeux un insecte noir qui traçait dans l'azur un large sillon écumeux et glacé' (p. 17).

Here the effect is more self-conscious, strained almost. The precise, adult term used for the red of the cranes, the poetic terms used to describe the plane's vapour trail clash somewhat with the impression of a fresh/ innocent vision of the world. (This is comparable with Laurence's childlike pleasure in the imaginary landscapes formed by the clouds.)⁵⁶ Happy memories are prompted for the woman by the smell of cut grass in the park when she goes to meet her friend, Martine: 'En entrant dans le jardin, l'odeur d'herbe coupée m'a prise au coeur: odeur des alpages où je marchais, sac au dos, avec André, si émouvante d'être l'odeur des prairies de mon enfance' (p. 17). The smell takes the woman back to walks in mountain pastures (note elevation) and further back still to her childhood. The text goes on to evoke the pleasures of memory in an image that combines water, light and colour: 'j'aperçois [mon passé] en transparence au fond du moment présent; il lui donne sa couleur, sa lumière comme les roches ou les sables se reflètent dans le chatolement de la mer' (p. 17). The impression of joyfulness is undermined by the poignancy of the woman's addendum: 'l'ombre des jours défunts veloute mes émotions, mes plaisirs'. Clashes here are disturbing. Not only the opposition shadow and light, but also the association of death and thick velvet that contrasts with transparency and movement. Movement replicated in the rhythm of the

⁵⁶ A similar technique is used to evoke the woman's delirium as, alone in her flat, she confronts the depression brought on by a definitive (for now) separation from Philippe after an angry quarrel: 'Un rien me fascinait, m'obsédait. Rencontre d'un foulard rouge et d'un coussin violet: quand ai-je vu pour la dernière fois des fuchsias, leur robe d'évêque et de cardinal, leur long sexe frêle? le volubilis lumineux, la simple églantine, le chèvrefeuille échevelé, les narcisses, ouvrant dans leur blancheur de

beginning of the quotation contrasts with the slow, insistent rhythm of its final words.

Progressively, the discrepancy between the woman's myth and her experience, hinted at here, will impose itself.⁵⁷ When the woman joins André in Villeneuve, she responds wistfully to the landscape, to its sights and smells, 'eau verte, ciel bleu, odeur de maquis' (p. 69), as if she were apart from it, an outsider. She realises she would have been better off there if only André had wanted her there; it is as if the landscape mirrors and embodies the distance she feels has come between herself and André. She excludes herself from the happiness represented by the green pool where André swims freely and unselfconsciously (p. 69).⁵⁸

Transparency reappears in 'La Femme rompue' in evocations of joy.

Unexpectedly, at a New Year's Eve party, Monique feels lighthearted and happy: 'La gaieté: une transparence de l'air, une fluidité du temps, une facilité à respirer; je n'en demandais pas plus' (p. 218). Her momentary cheerfulness one evening is expressed metaphorically as transparency. But her moment of well-being is ephemeral; she reexperiences the anguish of self doubt as she tries to imagine what Maurice thinks of her. Happiness in 'La Femme rompue' is represented metaphorically as a blue sky.

When Maurice tells Monique there is another woman in his life, the dialogue is interrupted by a vivid memory of the moment when they promised they would be faithful to each other: '(Tout était bleu au-dessus de notre tête et sous nos pieds; on apercevait à travers le détroit la côte africaine. [...])' (p. 131). The same motif recurs, the

grands yeux étonnés, quand?' (p. 57). This description of flowers suggests a drug induced obsession with detail.

⁵⁷ Smells are powerful vehicles for emotion in 'L'Age de discrétion'. The change in the woman's frame of mind is figured by two opposing images of roses. Early in the story, the library is full of the scent of 'un gros bouquet de roses fraîches et naïves comme des laitues' (p. 11). Later, in the garden in Villeneuve, 'les roses meurtries par le soleil exhalaient une odeur poignante comme une plainte' (p. 66).

⁵⁸ Anne Ophir offers an interesting reading of this image, suggesting that the pool is a symbol of the maternal and that André undergoes a form of rebirth in the pool. *Regards féminins*, p. 31. Ellen Moeurs explores the feminine symbolism of landscapes in Chapter 11, 'Metaphors: A Postlude', in *Literary Women*, pp. 243-64.

evocation of something lost, as Monique watches Maurice leave to join Noëllie for the weekend. Again interrupted by a memory: 'Il faisait un tendre ciel d'été, au-dessus des derniers feuillages d'automne. (La pluie d'or des feuilles d'acacia, sur une route rose et grise, en revenant de Nancy) (p. 150). The small wooden statuette that Monique and Maurice had bought together in Egypt, comes to symbolise the happiness/ love that Monique has lost. Devastated, she sobs when Quillan, a man she contemplates having a sexual liaison with, accidentally/ symbolically breaks the statuette in two (p. 170). Later she projects her feelings onto the statuette: 'Je regarde ma statuette égyptienne: elle s'est très bien recollée. Nous l'avons achetée ensemble. Elle était toute pénétrée de tendresse, du bleu du ciel. Elle est là, nue, désolée. je la prend dans mes mains et je pleure' (p. 232). 'Monique has a dream at the height (depth?) of her breakdown/ crisis in which the colour blue figures her lost happiness: 'L'autre nuit, en rêve, j'avais une robe bleu ciel et le ciel était bleu' (p. 237). There are childlike overtones in the simplicity of the syntax here. (Readers are reminded of the blue sky at Sylvie's funeral in 'Monologue' (p. 99). The blue sky/ sunshine throw into relief Murielle's misery.)

There is a further cluster of images that intersects with the series of poignant images just examined. They are images of dance and performance that figure moments when characters are open to surges of semiotic energy and an experience of merging but when the balance tips too far and the integrity of their personality is endangered.⁵⁹ Potentially positive moments in the texts shift to negative. One of the central images in *Les Belles Images* is that of the little Greek girl's dance. Significantly, the dance is performed in a café overlooking a valley, under a vast, starlit sky. Laurence watches the little girl: 'elle tournait sur elle-même, les bras soulevés, le visage noyé d'extase, l'air tout à fait folle. Transportée par la musique, éblouie, grisée, transfigurée, éperdue' (p.

⁵⁹ For an explanation of 'semiotic energy', see my Introduction and Chapter Three.

158). The child is ecstatic, carried away by the music. The term 'folle' (repeated later when Laurence remembers the child as 'l'enfant folle de musique', p. 174) has inescapable connotations of madness as well as extravagance. For Laurence it is a boundary melting moment; she identifies with the dancer: 'Moi aussi j'étais possédée par cette enfant que la musique possédait. Cet instant passionné n'aurait pas de fin' (p. 158). She experiences a moment out of time. In a sudden shift in the text the little girl is transformed in Laurence's imagination: 'Petite condamnée à mort, affreuse mort sans cadavre. La vie allait l'assassiner' (p. 158). Laurence identifies the little dancer with her daughter, Catherine. As Elizabeth Fallaize argues, the little dancing girl represents Laurence's 'dim perception of a different way forward for Catherine'.⁶⁰ A future where feeling and self expression, however risky they may be, are nurtured not repressed.

This dance at the heart of *Les Belles Images* that is connected to Laurence's sense of identity, is a point of intersection with *L'Invitée*. Dance in particular and performance generally are key motifs in that book. Dancing in *L'Invitée* is also linked to moments which weaken boundaries, when characters are subject to powerful feelings. There are the two key performances in the Spanish night-club, the dance and the poem, during which Xavière deliberately burns herself and enters a trance like state and during which Françoise experiences the horror of engulfment and loss of self (pp. 353-55 and 362-65). These incidents are foreshadowed early in the novel as Françoise and Xavière ('fascinée') watch the dancer in the Moorish café (pp. 21-22) and when later, in a night-club, Xavière herself dances 'la tête un peu rejetée en arrière, le visage extatique' (p. 36). Françoise's experience in the Spanish night-club is foreshadowed when, during Paule's first performance at the Christmas party, she comes to the shocking realisation '— Je ne suis personne' (p. 184). Her sense of identity is precarious, her boundary

⁶⁰ Fallaize, *The Novels*, p. 134.

tenuous: 'Cette femme elle l'avait laissée pousser au hasard, sans lui imposer de contours' (p. 184). When Paule dances again, Françoise is torn by the recognition that in her relationship with Pierre she has not the symbiosis she desires. Again, during Paule's performance, Xavière appears to be in an ecstatic trance, just as she will be in the Spanish night-club.⁶¹ Jane Heath argues that the performances in the Spanish night-club are characteristic of the Kristevan semiotic; in each performance it is rhythm and movement that prompts a response.⁶² The same argument can be applied to the dance in *Les Belles Images*. Exposure to the forces of the semiotic is destabilising. In my view, the significance of these moments resides in their power to remove protective barriers. Characters are open to experiences of merging/ oneness which can endanger their sense of self rather than allow them a fleeting fulfilment of their desire for unity.

The imagery in *L'Invitée*, in *Les Belles Images* and in the stories collected in *La Femme rompue*, is an imagery of madness. Clusters of images form a rich symbolic landscape that transmits the women protagonists' experience of madness. To a large extent, the imagery accounts for the tone of the texts, a tone at once sombre and hyperbolic. Running through the bleak, desperate landscape, a stream of nostalgic images evoke a sense of the well-being and happiness that now eludes the women. There is a notable affinity between the symbolic landscapes of the early and later fiction. Images first found in the extravagant Gothic text of *L'Invitée*, persist in the later fiction. Embedded more sparsely in the text, they nevertheless retain traces of excess. Simone de Beauvoir's imagery voices the inexpressible pain and isolation of madness.

⁶¹ It is worth noting that Françoise's experience of oneness discussed above occurred while she watched Xavière dance. Interestingly, Françoise claims not to enjoy dancing herself and early in the novel is reluctant to dance (see pp. 34 and 37). She defines herself as 'une femme qui ne sait pas danser' (p. 180). As the novel progresses, her determination not to dance relents. For other instances of the dancing motif in *L'Invitée*, see also pp. 179-80, 185-86, 277-79, 302, 310-12, 339.

⁶² Heath, pp. 31-32.

Chapter Three

Instability and Incoherence

This chapter will examine the textual strategies that disrupt and unsettle the narratives of *L'Invitée*, *Les Belles Images* and *La Femme rompue*. The disruption and instability in the text which subvert coherence constitute its madness. It is specifically the way in which madness is a quality of the telling of the stories, of the text (the discourse that tells the story), that is my subject here.¹

I want to look at how Simone de Beauvoir's texts duplicate the 'dédoublément' and disintegration of sense of self experienced by characters on the brink of madness and how notions of identity as fixed and stable are undermined. Character function, not character as such, will be the centre of interest. In particular, I shall explore the way in which character doubles are used. I shall also consider other textual strategies that introduce instability into the narrative and unsettle meaning. I shall then go on to analyse the particular textual strategies that disrupt the fiction and introduce incoherence into the narratives. Firstly, temporal incoherence and the distortion of time will be considered. Focus will then shift to textual fragmentation and interruption and incoherence. Finally, I shall treat disrupted syntax.²

Julia Kristeva has identified a number of features which disrupt and destabilise the text under the influence of semiotic drives. She argues that semiotic energy is expressed in a variety of ways affecting rhythm, language and meaning. A number of

¹ I am adopting the definitions proposed by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan. I understand 'story' to be a succession of events. 'Text' refers to the discourse that tells the story. 'Narration' (not treated here) is the process of production of the text. See *Narrative Fiction*, pp. 3-4.

² Although these aspects of Simone de Beauvoir's writing practice might be illustrated by a close reading of all the texts under consideration, the textual strategies being present to a greater or lesser extent in *L'Invitée*, *Les Belles images*, and in the three stories in *La Femme rompue*, in each case I have opted to consider a particular feature in just one, two, or sometimes three, texts that best exemplify it. I do not discuss 'L'Age de discrétion' here but the disruptive textual strategies in question are by no means absent from the least transgressive text of my corpus.

the 'mad' textual strategies I am concerned with in this chapter coincide with these features. Deviations from conventional syntax which disrupt the signifying order are characteristic of such writing. Ruptures, absences and breaks in symbolic language reveal semiotic tension in a text. Likewise, any irregularity, modulation or rhythm which disrupts the anticipated structure of the text is evidence of semiotic activity. In this connection, Kristeva mentions the use of exclamation marks, ellipses, and surges in energy evoking panting, breathlessness or acceleration. In addition, an apparent lack of logical construction is, as Toril Moi points out, evidence that the semiotic has broken through 'the strict rational defences of conventional social meaning'.³ Kristeva also considers the inclusion of plural meanings within a text to signal that semiotic energy is disrupting the text.⁴ The reader's position is also called into question by disrupted texts that refuse to corroborate their position as unified, masterful subjects.

Notwithstanding Simone de Beauvoir's rejection of her ideas⁵, Hélène Cixous' theories on *écriture féminine* intersect with Simone de Beauvoir's writing practice. A number of the textual strategies that constitute the madness in Simone de Beauvoir's fiction correspond to aspects of feminine writing. It is possible to read her texts as a challenge to the 'rules of (linear) logic, objective meaning, and the single, self-referential viewpoint decreed by masculine law'.⁶ Simone de Beauvoir's writing can be described as 'feminine' to the extent that it 'deconstructs the 'all-powerful, all-knowing "I"' and calls into question conventional notions of character as a stable, unified construct.⁷

³ Moi, *Sexual/ Textual Politics*, p. 11.

⁴ This aspect of Simone de Beauvoir's writing practice will be treated in depth in Chapter Four. It is relevant here insofar as ambiguous narrative situations and multiple focalisation generate plural meanings.

⁵ This is discussed in relation to language and meaning in Chapter Four.

⁶ Sellers, Susan, *Language and Sexual Difference: Feminist Writing in France*, London: Macmillan, 1991, p. 144.

⁷ Sellers, *Language and Sexual Difference*, p. 145.

To begin then, I will consider the treatment of identity in Simone de Beauvoir's fiction. Conventional definitions of identity as fixed and stable are called into question. Characters who find themselves at the limits of sanity are threatened by a loss of identity as their personalities disintegrate. This process and the 'dédoublement' they experience, is duplicated on a textual level. One of the ways in which the integrity of character is undermined in the text is the use of character doubles, mirrored characters.⁸

In *L'Invitée* readers encounter an interlacing of mirrored characters. Although the narrative foregrounds the unity of Françoise and Pierre, this is constantly undercut (in many ways Françoise and Pierre are a pseudo-duo) and the text substitutes the Françoise/Élisabeth pair.⁹ Simone de Beauvoir draws our attention to her use of character doubles and, in particular, to the connection between Françoise and Élisabeth, in her memoirs. She notes:

Je remarque que dans la plupart de mes romans j'ai placé à côté des héroïnes centrales un repoussoir: Denise s'oppose à Hélène dans *Le Sang des autres*, Paule à Anne dans *Les Mandarins*. Mais la relation de Françoise à Élisabeth est plus étroite: la seconde est une inquiétante contestation de la première.

(*La Force de l'âge*, footnote 1, p. 350.)

Élisabeth is more than a foil to Françoise. Élisabeth represents a challenge to Françoise in as much as 'elle [Françoise] voyait en elle comme une parodie d'elle même: mais par

⁸ Of course, the text does not simply present a pre-existing fixed identity but characters construct themselves/ are constructed by their narratives. In 'La Femme rompue', Monique writes her diary precisely in order to forge an identity, to discover who she is. Aware that her diary is not a repository of absolute truth, she continues to keep it all the same: 'J'ai repris mon stylo non pour revenir en arrière mais parce que le vide était si immense en moi, autour de moi, qu'il fallait ce geste de ma main pour m'assurer que j'étais encore vivante' (p. 223). The process of character construction is referred to explicitly in the text. Monique's psychiatrist insists that she writes her diary and she is in no doubt as to his reasoning: 'il essaie de me rendre de l'intérêt pour moi-même, de me restituer mon identité' (p. 239). In *L'Invitée*, Françoise's identity depends on her grasping narrative supremacy and eliminating Xavière and with her 'cette femme détestée qui était désormais Françoise' (p. 500), 'jalouse, traîtresse, criminelle' (p. 500). Françoise claims the right to determine who she is, to tell her own story. Harold Wardman discusses Françoise's desire 'to be the omniscient narrator of her own life and of the lives of others' in 'Self-Coincidence and Narrative in *L'Invitée*', *Essays In French Literature*, 19, 1982, 87-103.

⁹ Jane Heath discusses the relationship between Pierre and Françoise, arguing convincingly that Pierre acts as a mirror for Françoise. Heath, p. 26.

moment cette caricature lui semblait mettre en question sa propre vérité' (p. 350).¹⁰ At the same time, Simone de Beauvoir affirms that Françoise and Élisabeth are essentially different in that, unlike Élisabeth, 'il était rare que Françoise s'inquiétât de ce vide installé au coeur de toute créature humaine' (p. 350). These assertions appear to be somewhat contradictory and imprecision is increased because of the proliferation of third person pronouns in the last but one quotation. We know that Simone de Beauvoir put a great deal of herself in Françoise.¹¹ She also tells us in *La Force de l'âge* that she gave important aspects of herself to Élisabeth: 'Elle cédait à ce vertige que j'avais connu à côté de Zaza [...]; la vérité du monde et de son être même appartenait à d'autres: à Pierre, à Françoise' (p. 350). There are distinct echoes here of the interpretation Simone de Beauvoir gives of the murder. She tells us that Françoise (like Simone de Beauvoir herself) is threatened by the danger that 'autrui pouvait non seulement lui voler le monde, mais s'emparer de son être et l'ensorceler' (p. 347). Despite this essential affinity, Simone de Beauvoir's memoirs focus attention on what separates them. In stressing the differences between Françoise and Élisabeth, it is as if Simone de Beauvoir sought to preserve the positive in herself (that is, what she finds acceptable) for Françoise (her alter ego) whilst distancing herself from the negative that is projected onto Élisabeth.¹²

¹⁰ Brosman also refers to the fact that Simone de Beauvoir calls Élisabeth a challenge and a foil, 'un repoussoir'. I cannot agree with Brosman's interpretation of the challenge that Élisabeth represents to Françoise. She writes: '[Élisabeth] is the portrait of a failure — what the heroine does not want to become. An aspiring painter, Élisabeth is unconvincing as a potential artist, either because Beauvoir wanted to portray failure or because she was unable to draw the portrait of any artist except herself, projected onto Françoise. [...] In a classic illustration of bad faith, she attempts to fool herself into believing that her lover, Claude, who no longer even desires her, will divorce his wife'. *Simone de Beauvoir Revisited*, pp. 53-4. This interpretation is based on a misreading of the text. Élisabeth is in fact a successful artist. The fact that she cannot enjoy her success is part of her tragedy, see pp. 88, 237, 271. Élisabeth does not persist in her hopes that Claude will leave his wife, see below and p. 271.

¹¹ In *La Force de l'âge*, Simone de Beauvoir writes: 'J'adoptai d'ordinaire le point de vue de Françoise à qui je prêtais, à travers d'importantes transpositions, ma propre expérience' (p. 347); and explaining why Pierre is not, perhaps, a fully rounded character: 'J'ai mis en Françoise trop de moi-même pour la lier à un homme qui m'eût été étranger [...]' (p. 351).

¹² In her discussion of the *amoureuse*, Toril Moi points to Simone de Beauvoir's efforts to distance characters resembling herself from madness. *Simone de Beauvoir*, p. 218.

As I shall show, Élisabeth bears the burden of Françoise's darker side. She is the negative mirror image of Françoise, constructed in opposition to her as Françoise's evil double. Furthermore, Françoise's 'madness' (that is, the way in which her psychic stability is threatened) is underplayed in the text and projected onto Élisabeth. It is her *mauvaise foi*, not Françoise's that is underlined. However, at the same time as they are opposed, they are intimately connected on a textual level by shared imagery and lexis and the attempt to separate the two characters fails. In constructing Françoise and Élisabeth as character doubles the text undermines the demoniac/ benign dichotomy. For if Élisabeth is constructed as demoniac, textual inter-references and interferences make it impossible to sustain the image of Françoise as blameless victim. The sane/ insane dichotomy is also undermined. Élisabeth's emotional and mental instability is evoked by images that, textually speaking, she and Françoise have in common.¹³ Textual parallels expose Françoise's *mauvaise foi* that otherwise remains unnamed.

These arguments find support in an analysis of the network of shared images and lexis connecting the two characters. Firstly, I shall deal with images and lexis that evoke emotional distress. When Françoise tells Xavière that Élisabeth's problem is that she is 'tout affolée quand elle regarde au-dedans d'elle-même parce qu'elle ne trouve que du vide et du creux' (p. 171), Françoise might well be speaking of herself too. At the Christmas party for example: 'Avec un éblouissement douloureux, Françoise se sentit transpercée d'une lumière aride et blanche qui ne laissait en elle aucun recoin d'espoir' (p. 180). She is no one: 'La lumière qui l'avait pénétrée tout à l'heure ne lui avait découvert que du vide' (p. 183). The emptiness at the heart of existence that Élisabeth

¹³ Élisabeth is portrayed as mad. Gerbert explicitly questions her sanity, 'de temps en temps il avait l'impression qu'elle était un peu folle' (p. 331), 'peut-être était-elle vraiment en train de devenir folle' (p. 333). His judgment is upheld throughout the text.

experiences (p. 271) is also experienced by Françoise. Élisabeth's and Françoise's panic is evoked in analogous terms:

Soudain Élisabeth eut un éblouissement de souffrance; elle vit son atelier vide, où aucun coup de téléphone ne serait plus attendu, le casier vide dans la loge du concierge, le restaurant vide, les rues vides. C'était impossible, elle ne voulait pas le perdre [...] , elle avait besoin de lui pour vivre.

(*L'Invitée*, p. 103.)

L'angoisse qui la [Françoise] saisit soudain était si violente qu'elle eut presque envie de crier; c'était comme si brusquement le monde se fût vidé; il n'y avait plus rien à craindre, mais plus rien non plus à aimer. Il n'y avait absolument rien. [...] si l'amitié de Pierre et de Xavière n'était qu'un mirage creux, l'amour de Françoise et de Pierre n'existait pas davantage [...].

(*L'Invitée*, p. 159.)¹⁴

Élisabeth's mental and emotional distress is repeatedly evoked by images which match those associated with Françoise. Compare: 'Élisabeth fut traversée d'une douleur aiguë' (p. 89); 'elle allait souffrir tout ce soir encore, elle prévoyait, les frissons, la fièvre, la moiteur des mains, les bourdonnements dans la tête, elle en était écoeurée à l'avance' (p. 90) with the evocation of Françoise's mental and physical suffering that become conflated: 'Sa tête bourdonnait' (p. 196); 'Elle frissonna; elle devait avoir la fièvre, ses mains étaient moites et tout son corps brûlait' (p. 211); 'ce goût de fièvre dans la bouche' (p. 379).¹⁵ Echoes in the text establish the correspondence between the two women. Élisabeth's 'éblouissement de souffrance' (p. 103) is echoed by the 'explosion de souffrance' that Françoise suffers when she realises that her 'hypocrite lâcheté l'avait conduite à n'être rien du tout' (p. 359). This in turn echoes Élisabeth's realisation that she has nothing to hope from Claude: 'la vérité lui était apparue dans son intolérable crudité: c'est par lâcheté qu'elle s'était nourrie de vains espoirs' (p. 271). Élisabeth's experience of time — 'il n'y avait que des minutes qui s'égouttaient lentement; la journée s'était passée dans l'attente de ces heures et ces heures s'écoulaient à vide, elle

¹⁴ See also pp. 89-90 where Élisabeth doubts the reality of her love for Claude.

¹⁵ The representation of Françoise's suffering is discussed in detail in Chapter One.

n'étaient plus à leur tour qu'une attente. [...] on était indéfiniment rejeté dans l'avenir, dès qu'il devenait présent, il fallait fuir [...] (p. 92) — will find a striking echo in the evocation of Françoise's existence: 'Des attentes, des fuites, toute l'année s'était passée ainsi. [...] Il ne restait aucun salut. On pouvait fuir, mais il faudrait bien revenir, et ce seraient d'autres attentes, et d'autres fuites, sans fin' (p. 438). Élisabeth's 'enfer sordide' (p. 104) is matched by Françoise's 'noir enfer' (p. 397). At different points in the text, both characters' alienation is suggested by their looking at reality in a mirror. Élisabeth, when she is in the Pôle Nord with Claude and desperately unhappy, watches the apparently happy trio 'au fond du miroir' (p. 104) and later, studies her own flat in the mirror where it somehow seems more real (p. 271). Françoise, feeling excluded by Pierre and Xavière, watches them laughing and talking in the mirror behind the bar in the café (p. 300), 'séparée de Pierre, et du plaisant décor dont la glace lui renvoyait le reflet, séparée d'elle-même' (p. 301). Both Élisabeth and Françoise are haunted by the sense that they are shut out of a secret. Françoise imagines Pierre and Xavière together:

[Elle] évoqua les banquettes de cuir avec leurs gros clous cuivrés et les vitraux, et les abat-jour à carreaux rouges et blancs, mais c'était en vain: les visages et les voix et le goût des cocktails à l'hydromel, tout avait revêtu un sens mystérieux qui se fût dissipé si Françoise avait poussé la porte. [...] Jamais, même pas par eux, le secret de leur tête-à-tête ne pourrait être dévoilé.

(*L'Invitée*, pp. 152-53.)

When they are on holiday together, Élisabeth watches Françoise and Pierre from the doorway to the garden:

[Elle] resta clouée sur place: dès qu'ils l'apercevraient, ils changeraient de visage, il ne fallait pas se montrer avant d'avoir déchiffré leur secret.

(*L'Invitée*, p. 468.)¹⁶

The cumulative effect of these correspondences is to make it impossible to dissociate Françoise from the madness that threatens Élisabeth. Their mental and emotional

¹⁶ See also p. 87: 'Françoise ne livrait pas son vrai visage [...]. Ici, c'était la vraie figure de Françoise qui avait laissé sa trace, et cette trace était indéchiffrable', and p. 93: 'jamais les amis de Françoise ne se montraient à Élisabeth sous leur vrai jour'; 'tous les secrets de Françoise étaient bien gardés'.

instability coincide despite the fact that Françoise's stability is never overtly questioned. This network of shared images and lexis mean that readers' confidence in Françoise's stability and reliability as focaliser is undermined.

In a similar way, readers' faith in the image of Françoise as innocent victim of Xavière's wiles is put into question by a shared network of images and lexis that connect her with Élisabeth's demonisation. Élisabeth is clearly demoniacal in her madness and delirium as she fantasises about harming the trio:

Est-ce un jour ils n'allaient pas descendre eux aussi au fond de cet enfer sordide? Attendre en tremblant, appeler au secours en vain, supplier, rester seul dans les regrets, l'angoisse et un dégoût de soi sans fin. Si sûrs d'eux, si orgueilleux, si invulnérables. Ne trouverait-on pas un moyen de leur faire du mal, en guettant bien?

(*L'Invitée*, p. 104.)

Her jealousy sustains her desire to make them suffer: 'Quelque chose à faire; un acte authentique qui ferait couler de vraies larmes' (p. 283). She sees it as a way of feeling truly alive. Her evil is underlined. In the scene where she manipulates Gerbert, using him to upset what she takes to be the harmony of the trio, she is an Iago figure (pp. 333-35). In contrast, it is Françoise's high moral standards that are highlighted in the text. Admittedly she talks of jettisoning them: 'Il ne se passerait peut-être plus longtemps avant qu'elle s'en affranchisse' (p. 444), and when she learns that Pierre no longer loves Xavière 'Françoise accueillit sans scandale la joie mauvaise qui envahissait son coeur; ça lui avait coûté trop cher naguère de vouloir se garder l'âme pure' (p. 466).¹⁷ Yet shortly after this Françoise asserts that 'c'étaient les vieilles vertus dédaignées qui remportaient la victoire' (p. 467). She insists that her affair with Gerbert was an innocent, bucolic idyll and in order to maintain this version of events she will kill Xavière. On one level the text vindicates Françoise. At the same time, on another level,

¹⁷ Even this is echoed by Élisabeth. 'Observer des règles, jouer loyalement le jeu, c'était idiot, personne ne vous en savait gré' (p. 105).

Françoise shares Élisabeth's demoniacal status. A web of textual connections constructs her as Élisabeth's counterpart.

Élisabeth's ambivalent desire to either become or destroy Françoise (p. 87), is reminiscent of Françoise's attitude towards Xavière, her desire to annex Xavière's existence to her own and, ultimately, her recourse to murder. Élisabeth's hatred of Claude (pp. 102-103, 270-71) is echoed by Françoise's hatred of Xavière (pp. 313, 445).¹⁸ Élisabeth's parodical fantasy murder foreshadows Françoise's murder of Xavière. As the theatre lights go down, 'une image traversa Élisabeth, un revolver, un poignard, un flacon avec une tête de mort; tuer. Claude? Suzanne? Moi-même? Peu importait, ce sombre désir de meurtre gonflait puissamment le coeur' (p. 94). Françoise will act out her own fantasy in the final pages of the novel. Just as Élisabeth looks at herself in the mirror as she determines to act and compel Claude to choose between her and his wife, Suzanne, so Françoise gazes at her reflection at decisive moments:

Élisabeth jeta un coup d'oeil dans une glace et elle vit ses cheveux roux, sa bouche amère; il y avait en elle quelque chose d'amer et de fulgurant, sa résolution était prise, cette soirée serait décisive.

(*L'Invitée*, p. 93.)

Françoise se regarda dans la glace. [...]
— J'ai gagné, pensa Françoise avec triomphe.

(*L'Invitée*, p. 467.)

Son image jaillit soudain du fond du miroir. [...]
[Françoise] fixa l'image. [...]
C'est elle ou moi. Ce sera moi.

(*L'Invitée*, pp. 500-501.)

Both characters appear demoniacal as they stare at their reflection.¹⁹ Likewise, both of them share Faustian overtones. There is not only Françoise's Faustian ordeal once her

¹⁸ It is interesting to note the textual correspondence that connects Françoise and Élisabeth in terms of their attitude to Xavière. Compare: 'une moue de Xavière comptait plus que tout son désarroi à elle' [Françoise] (p. 195); 'la moindre de ses [Xavière] humeurs comptait plus que tout le destin d'Élisabeth' (p. 276).

¹⁹ This defiant gesture of Françoise is discussed in detail in Chapter One.

betrayal of Xavière has been discovered, when in her paroxysm 'les lettres sur le tapis étaient noires comme un pacte infernal' (p. 499).²⁰ Élisabeth's torment as she leaves Pierre is also marked by Faustian overtones. As Marlowe's Dr. Faustus, on the brink of hell, was prevented from repenting by Lucifer and Mephistophilis²¹, so too Élisabeth is unable to speak sincerely to or make a gesture towards her brother (p. 472-73). In turn, this recalls Françoise's reaction to Xavière's distress earlier in the novel: 'elle aurait voulu trouver un geste, un mot, mais ce n'était pas facile, elle revenait de trop loin' (p. 132). There is one final textual echo that should be pointed out in relation to Françoise's and Élisabeth's construction as evil doubles. Élisabeth experiences a sense of calm and plénitude in the face of war. She is about to say goodbye to Françoise and Pierre at the end of their holiday when she looks at the horizon: 'Tout était calme; le monde entier était en suspens et dans cette attente universelle, Élisabeth se sentit accordée sans crainte, sans désir à l'immobilité du soir' (p. 470). Her feelings are echoed by the impressions Françoise has as she decides to kill Xavière: 'Soudain un grand calme descendit en Françoise. Le temps venait de s'arrêter. Françoise était seule dans un ciel glacé' (p. 501). This complex network of shared images and lexis leads me to argue that it is not only the murder that unexpectedly turns Françoise into a monster.²² The textual parallels that construct her and Élisabeth as demoniacal doubles allow readers to glimpse a Françoise who does not conform to the image of innocent sufferer.

Françoise alternately recognises her resemblance to Élisabeth and acts in opposition to her, constantly projecting what she finds unacceptable in herself onto Élisabeth. She recognises for example that in loving Pierre, 'au fond elle ressemblait à Élisabeth; une fois pour toutes elle avait fait un acte de foi' (p. 157). She is daunted by

²⁰ See Chapter One.

²¹ 'Oh, he stays my tongue! I would lift up my hands, but see, they hold them, they hold them!'. Marlowe, Movement V, lines 179-81, p. 69.

²² This is contrary to what Simone de Beauvoir says in her memoirs. *La Force de l'âge*, p. 348.

the prospect of having to review her relationship with Pierre, 'ça demandait une force surhumaine'. Later, she compares herself to Élisabeth again, aware that she must face up to the truth of what is happening between herself and Pierre:

Ça faisait des jours et des jours que toutes ses pensées avaient un goût aigre: à l'intérieur d'Élisabeth ça devait être comme ça. Il ne fallait pas faire comme Élisabeth.

— Je veux voir clair, se dit Françoise.

Mais sa tête était remplie d'un grand tournoiement rougeâtre et piquant.

Il faut descendre, dit-elle brusquement.

(*L'Invitée*, p. 192.)

Again, although she opposes herself to Élisabeth, she is continuing to evade the truth. When she does confront her feelings and shares them with Pierre, she is aware of the danger: 'Il allait trouver de beaux arguments et ça serait commode d'y céder. Se mentir comme Élisabeth, Françoise ne voulait pas, elle y voyait clair; elle continua de sangloter avec entêtement' (p. 200). In fact, Pierre does find clever, baffling arguments to reassure her and Françoise allows herself to be convinced: 'Elle le croyait; mais ce n'était pas exactement ça la question. Elle ne savait plus trop quelle était la question' (p. 204).²³ A close reading of the text reveals that if Élisabeth is play-acting, then so too is Françoise. She is aware of her own lack of sincerity: 'Ses paroles, ses conduites, ne répondaient plus tout à fait aux mouvements de son coeur' (pp. 204-205). Ultimately, Françoise has no more honesty and integrity than Élisabeth. Françoise's *mauvaise foi* is not named in the text but is nonetheless discernable, pointed up by the textual parallels that construct her as Élisabeth's double.

The same mirroring of characters that undermines notions of identity as unified and stable can be traced in *Les Belles Images*. Although less developed than in *L'Invitée*, a complex web of identifications is nevertheless built up through repetition

²³ For the sake of argument, I am taking Élisabeth's *mauvaise foi* as given here, but there is textual evidence that she can be perfectly lucid/ honest with herself. Indeed, this makes her suffering more acute. See p. 271.

and echoes. Laurence and Catherine and the little Greek girl are connected. Between Laurence and her daughter the connection is explicit. Laurence's father tells her that of her two daughters, 'c'est Catherine qui te ressemble le plus', prompting Laurence to wonder: '— Oui je lui ai ressemblé, [...]. (Me ressemblera-t-elle?)' (pp. 104-105). In Greece, watching the 'enfant folle de musique' dancing, Laurence identifies with her then identifies her with Catherine, as the joyful, life-affirming dance is transformed into a macabre dance of death: 'Moi aussi j'étais possédée par cette enfant que la musique possédait. [...] Petite condamné à mort, affreuse mort sans cadavre. La vie allait l'assassiner. Je pensais à Catherine qu'on était en train d'assassiner' (pp. 158, 174). Jean-Charles's betrayal of Catherine is also a betrayal of Laurence. When he discusses Catherine at the dinner table Laurence is appalled:

La gorge de Laurence se contracte. Jean-Charles n'aurait pas dû, le lendemain, discuter en public le cas de Catherine. Une trahison, un viol. Quel romantisme! Mais une sorte de honte l'étouffe, comme si elle était Catherine et qu'elle eût surpris leurs propos.

(*Les Belles Images*, p. 173.)

The word 'trahison' and the violent imagery are a direct link with Jean-Charles's earlier betrayal of Laurence, when, during an argument over Catherine, he brings up her breakdown that he refers to as 'une crise de mauvaise conscience', and 'throws it in her face', confuting the sympathy and understanding he had feigned: 'Laurence se sent palir: comme s'il l'avait giflée. [...] Quelle trahison!' (p. 133).²⁴ The cumulative effect of textual links between Laurence and Catherine and the little Greek girl is to subvert solid boundaries of identity, thus duplicating Laurence's experience in the text.

I have shown that networks of shared images and lexis construct characters as doubles and have argued that the use of mirrored characters is one way in which the text

²⁴ As Jane Heath argues, Laurence's identification with Catherine heightens Laurence's desire to protect Catherine in that 'Catherine's escape is to some extent Laurence's too' (Heath, p. 133).

reproduces the disintegration of identity that characters threatened by madness experience. I have also suggested that this undermines the notion of a stable, unified identity which is further put into question by the instability that is inherent in the je/ elle split in the narrative in *Les Belles Images*.

One of the most unstable and unsettling aspects of *Les Belles Images* is the way the narrative voice shifts from 'je' to 'elle'.²⁵ This split, that is at the heart of the narrative, duplicates, on a textual level, Laurence's loss of psychic unity and feelings of alienation. First and third person narratives alternate not only from paragraph to paragraph but also within paragraphs and even within sentences. Let us consider the opening scenes. The novel seems to open in the first person, at least, the only indicators of the origin of narrative voice are in the first person ('Qu'est-ce que les autres ont que je n'ai pas?' 'Pourquoi est-ce que je pense ça?').²⁶ Then, after the first, long, fragmented paragraph, the narrative shifts to the third person ('Laurence a proposé le test du passeur [...] p. 8),²⁷ before shifting back to the first person within a sentence: 'Elle s'est beaucoup dépensée, c'est pour ça que maintenant elle se sent déprimée, je suis cyclique' (p. 8). As the narrative continues, mainly in the third person, the first person narrative interposes a commentary on it. Laurence makes a self-conscious revision of the witty reply she gave to Gilbert ('(Ce n'est pas vrai, en fait. Je dis ça pour être drôle.)' p. 12). Subsequently, her unspoken response to the effusive terms her sister uses to speak of their father breaks up the third person narrative once more:

Laurence se penche sur les dahlias; ce langage la gêne. Bien sûr, il a quelque chose que les autres n'ont pas, que je n'ai pas (mais qu'ont-ils que je n'ai pas non plus?). Roses, rouges, jaunes, orangés, elle serre dans la main les dahlias magnifiques.

²⁵ Strictly speaking, narration as such does not fall within the terms of reference of this study. Comments on the narrative situation in *Les Belles images* will be restricted to a consideration of how the text is unsettled/ disrupted by shifts in narrative voice.

²⁶ These might well, of course, be taken for first person interpolations in a third person narrative.

²⁷ The psychological test, *le test du passeur* (the ferryman's test) is described by Elizabeth Fallaize in *The Novels*, p. 141, footnote 21.

Then Laurence's looking out of the window and seeing Jean-Charles flirting with Gisèle Dufrène seems to be narrated in the first person (p. 17). Here, as in the first paragraph, this is what the only indicators imply. The narrative shifts to the first person again as Laurence recalls her breakdown of five years earlier and tries to convince herself that she is not about to be ill again: 'Maintenant je n'ai pas de raison de craquer. Toujours du travail devant moi, des gens autour de moi, je suis contente de ma vie. Non, aucun danger. C'est juste une question d'humeur' (p. 19). These shifts and ambiguities present in the opening section of the novel, are replicated throughout the text. However, by the final chapter, the balance has shifted.

Here, the first person narrative is much stronger, more sustained and it is the third person narrative that appears to intrude. Laurence determines: 'Je récapitulerai ce voyage image par image, mot par mot' (p. 153). She engages with and tells her own story in the first person. The third person breaks into the text in the present moment when Laurence breaks off her retrospective narrative to drink the soup Marthe has brought her and to speak to Jean-Charles (pp. 168-70), and again, very briefly, at the point in the narrative when Laurence gets back from the trip. Her alienation is perfectly conveyed by the shift as Jean-Charles meets her at the airport (p. 170). From this point 'elle' erupts in the the most painful moments of Laurence's story, when, during the family dinner, Jean-Charles discusses Catherine (p. 173) and when Laurence becomes aware of her utter isolation (pp. 175-76). Although Laurence's finding out about her parents' reconciliation from Dominique is narrated in the first person, her painful meeting with her father, where he confirms it is true, is narrated in the third person. So, too, is Laurence's taking to her bed. As Laurence's anguish reaches its climax, and as

text-time and story-time reconverge, (story-time and narrative moment coincide), the narrative voice oscillates between 'elle' and 'je':

Je suis jalouse mais surtout, surtout... Elle respire trop vite, elle halète. [...] Ce secret qu'elle se reprochait de n'avoir pas su découvrir, peut-être qu'après tout il n'existait pas. Il n'existait pas: elle le sait depuis la Grèce. J'ai été *décue*. Le mot la poignarde. Elle serre le mouchoir contre ses dents comme pour arrêter le cri qu'elle est incapable de pousser. Je suis *décue*. J'ai raison de l'être.

(*Les Belles Images*, pp. 179-80.)

Laurence's battle to face up to her pain is reproduced in the text as 'je' and 'elle' succeed each other. When the narrative is picked up again as Laurence wakes from exhausted sleep, the first person voice fades once more and the narrative reverts to 'elle' for the final three pages that relate Laurence's talk with Jean-Charles. The first person asserts itself only once; 'il n'a pas envie que je craque de nouveau. Si je tiens bon, je gagne' (p. 182). The intermittency of the first person voice at the end of *Les Belles Images* contributes to readers' lack of confidence in Laurence's stability and sense of self.

The je/ elle split that clearly unsettles the text has been addressed and understood differently by a number of critics. It is clear that Laurence is both character in, and at times, first person narrator of her story. Doubt arises over the user of the third person also present in the text. I believe this too can be taken to be Laurence as, alienated from herself, she watches herself act and speak like she watches those around her, 'soudain indifférente, distante, comme si elle n'était pas des leurs' (p. 19). She is divided against herself and, struggling to hold on to her sense of identity, incapable of sustaining her 'I'.²⁸ The fact that the first person voice is more sustained in the early sections of the final chapter, together with the pattern of third person eruptions into the narrative, add support to this reading as it makes psychological sense. Laurence relives the trip and her

²⁸ Jane Heath also argues that Laurence occupies both the first-person and third-person narrative positions. See Heath, p. 128.

homecoming not distanced from herself. As she says of the trip: 'Tout ce qui m'arrivait était vrai' (p. 155). Laurence's 'I' is stifled in moments of overwhelming pain as if she withdraws and has recourse to the third person in order to protect herself. The dominant use of the third person in the narrative present accords with her overriding sense of alienation.

An alternative explanation is that the user of the third person is an external narrative agent. In this version of the narrative situation, we are dealing with two narrative agents and it is not just Laurence's 'I' that emerges only intermittently, it is her voice too. This is the view of Elizabeth Fallaize who argues that 'though Laurence's is the *consciousness* which the narrative draws on, her *voice* is intermittent, fading for long stretches of the narrative in which the character apparently retrenches behind her social persona, and re-asserting itself at moments where the character seems to approach something resembling self-awareness'.²⁹ These different readings are not mutually exclusive. What is of crucial importance is precisely the ambiguity of the narrative situation, the fact that it is fluid, impossible to pin down. The *je/ elle* split unsettles and destabilises the text and enacts its madness.

Before leaving the narrative situation in *Les Belles Images*, I want to address briefly the related question of focalization.³⁰ The narrative is always focalized through Laurence.³¹ At times she is both focalizer and focalized, focalizing herself from within. Others are focalized from without.³² Laurence is generally speaking an internal (character) focalizer in that 'the locus of [...] focalization is inside the represented

²⁹ Fallaize, *The Novels*, p. 120.

³⁰ Whereas the narrative agent is the voice in the text, the focaliser is the agent whose perception orients the text. See Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, pp. 72 and 74.

³¹ I am adopting the classification of focalizers put forward by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, pp. 71-77.

³² There is one notable exception when the focalizer appears to penetrate Dominique's feelings and thoughts: 'Dimanche à Feuverolles, elle est resté enfermée dans sa chambre en prétextant un mal de tête, ravagée par l'absence de Gilbert, pensant: «Il ne viendra plus jamais.»' (p. 72).

events'.³³ However, the situation is rendered more complex in retrospective sections of the narrative as the focalizer can be either the experiencing character (Laurence at the time the narrated events were happening) or the narrator (Laurence looking back on the narrated events). In the latter case, Laurence is an external (narrator) focalizer.³⁴ In Chapter Four of *Les Belles Images*, for example, Laurence knows the outcome of the story she is telling when she begins it.³⁵ Focalization is generally synchronous with represented events but shifts from internal to external focalization are a source of ambiguity and instability in the text. For example, during the trip, Laurence's father makes generous comments about Dominique and we read: 'Je ne l'ai pas contredit; je ne voulais pas priver ma pauvre mère des bribes d'amitié qu'il lui accordait' (p. 157). The focalizer can either be Laurence in Greece or Laurence narrating the incident in the full knowledge of her mother and father's reconciliation. In the latter case the tone is ironic.³⁶ Likewise, there is no indication whether the angry interjection 'Du cheval! ça c'était une idée formidable; même affectivement. Remplacer une amie par un cheval!' (p. 172), betrays the awareness of Laurence at the time of the quarrel or of Laurence recalling it. And when Jean-Charles discusses Catherine it is impossible to distinguish between Laurence's synchronous response and her retrospective understanding: 'Une trahison, un viol. Quel romantisme!' (p. 173). Unstable focalisation introduces inconclusiveness into the text, unsettling meaning and thereby introducing madness into the text.

I now want to go on to read the incoherence in Simone de Beauvoir's fictional texts as madness. For, as Peter Brooks has argued, 'mental health is a coherent life

³³ Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, p. 74.

³⁴ If the narrator is not Laurence but an external narrator then we must nevertheless posit the existence of two different levels of focalization and distinguish between events focalized at the time they took place and other events focalised subsequently.

³⁵ Up to p. 179, that is, when story-time and text-time reconverge.

³⁶ Irony is discussed in detail in my Chapter Four.

story, neurosis is a faulty narrative'.³⁷ Nothing is meaningful in itself. We create meaning by organising our experience. Now, insofar as the text resists order and logic, insofar as it tends towards meaninglessness (which is the meaning of the text), then the text is mad. In the mad textual universe Simone de Beauvoir creates, readers are disorientated and share the helplessness of characters trying to make sense of their lives. I am going to begin by looking at temporal confusion and incoherence before going on to deal with textual disruption and fragmentation.

Simone de Beauvoir's later texts, *Les Belles Images* and *La Femme rompue*, refuse to convey a sense of chronology, a sense of linear logic. Readers have to work to impose a sequential pattern on events. I want to illustrate this by briefly analysing 'Monologue', 'La Femme rompue', and *Les Belles Images*. In 'Monologue', readers are drawn into Murielle's madness and obsession as they attempt to make sense of her monologue at the same time as they are repelled by the vulgarity and sordidness of her delusion. They are confused by the non-linear structure of the story. No concessions are made; readers piece together Murielle's history, learning a little of the puzzle at a time. Readers look in vain for linear logic in the text; incidents are related in disorder, prompted by seemingly inconsequential details. An associative logic carries the narrative forward. The past intrudes in the present and the present disrupts the narration of past events. Quoting a fairly lengthy passage in full will allow me to demonstrate this. It occurs towards the beginning of the narrative:

Ça devait arriver ils dansent au-dessus de ma tête. Alors là ma nuit est foutue demain je serai en morceaux je devrai me doper pour voir Tristan et ça foirera. Il ne faut pas! Salauds! Je n'ai que ça dans la vie le sommeil. Salauds. Ils ont le droit de me piétiner ils en profitent. «L'emmerdeuse d'en dessous elle ne peut pas gueuler c'est le jour de l'an.» Rigolez je trouverai un moyen de vous avoir elle vous emmerdera l'emmerdeuse jamais je ne me suis laissé piétiner. Albert était furax: «Pas besoin de faire un éclat!» bien si justement! Il dansait avec Nina sexe

³⁷ Brooks, Peter, 'Psychoanalytic Constructions and Narrative Meanings', *Paragraph*, 7, 1986, 53-76 (pp. 53-54).

à sexe elle étalait ses gros seins elle puait le parfum mais on sentait en dessous une odeur de bidet et lui qui se trémoussait il bandait comme un cerf. [...]

Ils vont crever le plafond et me dégringoler sur la gueule. Je les vois d'ici c'est trop déguex ils se frottent l'un contre l'autre sexe à sexe ça les fait mouiller les bonnes femmes elles se rengorgent parce que le type a la queue en l'air. Et chacun se prépare à cocufier son meilleur ami sa très chère amie ils le feront cette nuit même dans la salle de bains même pas allongés la robe retroussée sur les fesses suantes quand on ira pisser on marchera dans le foutre comme chez Rose la nuit de mon éclat.

(*'La Femme rompue'*, pp. 90-91.)

In terms of events that make up the story, it emerges only gradually that Murielle's ex-husband, Albert, was unfaithful to her, with her best friend, Nina, at a party given by Rose and that Murielle, when she found out, made a scene. She is reliving those events in the present, imagining the same event taking place again, (only this time multiplied, as every guest, 'chacun' is about to betray their partner), at her upstairs neighbour's where there is a noisy party going on. (If this sequence of events can be worked out, it is nevertheless virtually impossible to distinguish fantasy and reality.) The text presents readers with a baffling, disordered series of statements, an extremely convoluted narrative. The dancing in the present gives rise to Murielle's insistence that she will not allow herself to be trampled on ('piétiner') which prompts the memory of an incident in the past when Albert might have thought he could trample on her but when she refused to acquiesce. This memory in turn moves Murielle to imagine the present scene upstairs until her lurid, delusional vision of the present gives way once more to the painful recollection of the incident in the past. The past and present coalesce. A succession of textual echoes serves as a narrative thread providing hinges on which it pivots: 'ils dansent au-dessus de ma tête' — 'Il dansait avec Nina' — 'Ils vont crever le plafond'; 'Ils ont le droit de me piétiner' — 'jamais je ne me suis laissé piétiner'; 'Il dansait avec Nina sexe à sexe' — 'ils se frottent l'un contre l'autre sexe à sexe'; 'elle étalait ses gros seins' — 'elles se rengorgent'; 'il bandait comme un cerf' — 'le type a la queue en

l'air'; 'une odeur de bidet' — 'dans la salle de bains' — 'les fesses suantes'; '«Pas besoin de faire un éclat!»' — 'on marchera dans le foutre comme chez Rose la nuit de mon éclat'. It is according to this associative logic that the narrative progresses.

Disrupted chronology is characteristic of the text as a whole. Present, past and future jostle in the text, within the same paragraph and even within the same sentence: 'Si je pouvais dormir je n'ai pas sommeil l'aube est encore loin c'est une heure lugubre et Sylvie est morte sans m'avoir comprise je ne m'en guérirai pas' (p. 104).

Although it is far from being as disrupted as 'Monologue', the second text I want to examine in terms of temporal incoherence, 'La Femme rompue', is not a simple linear/ chronological narrative either. The past disrupts the present to a lesser, though nonetheless real degree as memories involuntarily erupt into Monique's thoughts. For example, as Monique imagines Maurice's present with Noëllie, evoking intimate details of their shared life, a memory, an image of Monique and Maurice's shared life obtrudes:

Il se rase, il lui sourit, les yeux plus sombres et plus brillants, la bouche plus nue sous le masque de mousse blanche. Il apparaissait dans l'embrasure de la porte, avec dans les bras, enveloppé de cellophane, un grand bouquet de roses rouges: est-ce qu'il lui apporte des fleurs?

(*'La Femme rompue'*, p. 141.)

At this point in the text, the detail slows the pace of the narrative to such an extent that it almost stops, as if Monique were paralysed by this vivid, painful memory. Sometimes the past intrudes, breaking into the narrative, breaking up the text with brackets. When Maurice first tells Monique about his relationship with Noëllie, their dialogue is interrupted by a parenthesis (eight and a half lines long) as Monique relives, in the space of an instant, the moment when they swore to be faithful to each other (p. 131). Noting in her diary how she watched Maurice leave to join Noëllie for the weekend, Monique's narrative is interrupted by a memory: 'Il faisait un tendre ciel d'été, au-dessus des derniers feuillages d'automne. (La pluie d'or des feuilles d'acacia, sur une route rose et

grise, en revenant de Nancy.) Il est monté dans la voiture [...]’ (p. 150). Such interpositions unsettle the narrative and disorient readers.

Temporal confusion and incoherence also characterize the text of *Les Belles Images*. It is neither a straightforward retrospective nor a present tense narrative. Much of it is in the present tense³⁸ but there are shifts into the past tense (*le passé composé*), for example when Laurence relates her first meeting with Brigitte and her conversation with Catherine afterwards (pp. 52-57). Shifts in narrative perspective disorient readers. With no typographical indication of a break in the narrative, we read: ‘C’était hier. Et Laurence est préoccupée’ (p. 57). Readers are disconcerted by the apposition of past and présent. Another instance of the text resisting linear chronology occurs after Laurence’s quarrel with Jean-Charles over Catherine. The delivery of the bouquet of red roses is recounted in the present tense (p. 136), then the narrative shifts into the past tense to recount Jean-Charles’ coming home from a point in the present where ‘ils marchent, rue Faubourg Saint-Honoré, par un beau froid sec’ (p. 137). The trip to Greece is also narrated in the past tense although the present tense intrudes, translating the intensity of Laurence’s impressions as the plane takes off and she experiences a moment of plenitude, outside time and space: ‘L’avion pique brutalement vers le ciel [...]. Je suis ailleurs: nulle part et partout’ (p. 154). The trip is narrated from a point in the present when Laurence is in bed on the brink of madness. The present interrupts the retrospective narrative. Breaks are abrupt and confusing for readers. Laurence is recollecting how one evening she and her father had eaten in a small ‘typical’ restaurant, when Marthe’s voice intrudes:

Je mangeais avec appétit et indifférence...

La voix de Marthe:

— Laurence! il faut absolument que tu manges quelque chose.

³⁸ One effect of the use of the present tense is to reinforce the inference that Laurence is alienated from herself and watches herself live.

— Je dors, laisse-moi.

— Au moins un bouillon. Je vais te préparer un bouillon.

Elle m'a dérangée. Où en étais-je? La route de Delphes.

(*Les Belles Images*, pp. 156-57.)

The past and present overlap. The narrative is interrupted again as Marthe returns with the soup. Laurence tries to drink it but vomits and Jean-Charles appeals to Laurence to see a doctor. When they leave her, Laurence picks up her story in the past tense again (p. 168-69).

At times, an associative logic, comparable to the associative logic at work in 'Monologue', seems to operate in *Les Belles Images* too. The narrative thread weaves from point to point, hinging on words repeated in the text. An impression of contingency is created that corresponds to Laurence's sense that chance governs her existence. Even with regard to her marriage to Jean-Charles, for instance, 'elle s'étonne que ce soit si important et un hasard. Sans raison spéciale. (Mais tout est ainsi.)' (p. 67). One example of this hinges on the repetition 'vexée' — 'vexant' (p. 71). On a Sunday morning Laurence and Mona, her colleague, meet at Laurence's to finish an urgent project. Laurence feels 'vaguement vexée' when Mona leaves the flat. Readers know that Laurence and Jean-Charles are about to leave for Feuverolles. There is a typographical break in the text. The next section of the narrative opens with the words 'c'est vexant'. Readers' expectations that the narrative thread might continue by moving on to lunch at Feuverolles are disappointed. Associative logic takes the narrative to Laurence's inability to remember her dreams. It is probably several days later, the only mention of Sunday at Feuverolles is a brief reference to the fact that Dominique stayed in her room (p. 72). A further example hinges on the repetition 'belle' — 'belle' (p. 167). The narrative is ruptured though the break is unmarked typographically.³⁹ When

³⁹ I shall return to this rupture in the text below.

the narrative thread is picked up again the textual echo provides the link. The text pivots on the word 'belle':

- Je suppose que ce pays est plus gai l'été.
- La Grèce n'est pas gaie, m'a dit papa avec un soupçon de reproche; elle est belle.

Les Koraï étaient belles [...]

(*Les Belles Images*, pp. 166-67.)

Before concluding my examination of temporal incoherence in the texts, I want to address briefly the experience of time that is conveyed. It is typified by distortion and reification. This is exemplified in 'Monologue'. Actual time is marked in the text, time moves on and yet the narrative seems to trap readers in the eternal present of an unchanging obsession. Words, motifs and images are repeated and echoed in the text, Murielle does not move on. Repetition can literally stop time in the text. 'J'en ai marre, j'en ai marre marre marre marre [...]' takes up twelve lines of text, making (story) time stand still (p. 96). Readers are held fast, unable to move/ read on.⁴⁰ Likewise, 'Je veux gagner. Je veux je veux je veux je veux je veux' (p. 109) traps readers in the text. In a way, by making time stand still, the text exemplifies Murielle's own words: 'Toute ma vie il sera deux heures de l'après-midi un mardi de juin' (p. 111).⁴¹

I now want to address the incoherence that stems from fragmentation and interruption. I am going to concentrate on the most fractured text of my corpus, *Les Belles Images*. The first page of the novel introduces readers into a disorienting textual universe. Laurence's monologue is fragmented by dialogue which is in turn fragmented by Laurence's reflections thus bringing about what Irène M. Pagès calls a

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Fallaize makes the following point: 'The reader is left embarrassed, bewildered, confronted with the responsibility as reader and uncertain whether to conscientiously read the words, contemplate them on the page or fall back on counting them (a surprisingly frequent reaction). *The Novels*, p. 161. (The word 'marre' is repeated eighty-one times altogether.)

⁴¹ Repetition is discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

‘desubstantification of the real’, making what is real insubstantial.⁴² She shows convincingly how the first paragraph of *Les Belles Images* consists of a monologue interrupted by direct speech and narrative comment.⁴³ However, there are, I believe, problems with her analysis. It is not clear how ‘outside concrete reality can be either negated or confirmed according to the level to which punctuation assigns it within the story’ or how Laurence “empties” the existence of others of all reality’ (p. 138) simply by commenting ironically or otherwise on it. Desubstantification cannot be a function of the status of an utterance as indicated by punctuation nor of the purport of a remark. Rather, it comes about as a result of fragmentation and exists on a textual level. It is a function of a textual practice that deprives both descriptive monologue and interpolations of coherence and meaningfulness.⁴⁴ This effect is felt in the shocking (from an unprepared reader’s point of view) opening paragraph and subsequently, at different moments throughout the narrative. In the same way that Laurence’s personality disintegrates, so too does the text. In the same way that her sense of the real becomes more fragile, readers experience the dissolution of the real on a textual level.

Other textual strategies undermine the coherence of the narrative in a similar way. Fragmented/ interrupted dialogues are drained of sense. Conversations already underway are picked up and cut off as Laurence’s attention wanders. As the narrative

⁴² Pagès, Irène M., ‘Beauvoir’s *Les Belles images*: “Desubstantification” of Reality Through a Narrative’, *Forum For Modern Language Studies*, 11 (1975), 133-41.

⁴³ Pagès, “Desubstantification” of Reality’, p. 137.

⁴⁴ There are other, more minor, problems with Pagès’s argument. Her comments relate to the French text yet the passage is quoted in her article in an English translation with its different punctuation (p. 138). More seriously, there appears to be some confusion as to whether the different levels of narration she has distinguished are in direct or indirect speech. At first Pagès suggests that the descriptive part of Laurence’s monologue is in direct speech and that the speech of others and Laurence’s thoughts are in indirect speech (p. 137). This is not the case; the fact that both levels of narration are in direct speech actually adds to the incoherence of the passage and the disorientation of readers. As Pagès develops her argument, she begins, bafflingly, to refer to the direct speech of the second level of narration. Her assertion that ‘in *Les Belles images* the dialogues always take place between Laurence and one of the characters whose existence is part of her own’ (p. 135) is simply not true. Laurence repeatedly listens in to the dialogues and conversations of others (see pp. 90-94, 97, 99, 144, 145, 146-47, 149).

recounts one Saturday evening at Feuverolles, an excerpt from a conversation about chic restaurants between Dominique and an anonymous interlocutor (there are no reporting clauses) is superseded by a snatch of conversation between Jean-Charles and Dufrène before Laurence's attention is caught once more by Dominique's voice and, mid-way, her conversation becomes the focus of the narrative (pp. 92-93). As the guests 's'arrachent la parole' the conversation is represented with no typographical clues that it is in fact a dialogue. The distinction between dialogue and narrative is blurred. Two long sentences contain all the contradictory utterances of all of the participants in the conversation. There are, of course, no reporting clauses.

Avouez qu'il y a des livres qu'on ne peut plus écrire, des films qu'on ne peut plus voir, des musiques qu'on ne peut plus entendre, mais les chefs-d'oeuvre, ça ne date jamais, qu'est-ce qu'un chef d'oeuvre? Il faudrait éliminer les critères subjectifs, c'est impossible, pardon c'est l'effort de toute la critique moderne, et les critères des Goncourt et des Renaudot, je voudrais les connaître, les prix sont encore plus mauvais que l'année dernière, [...] mais non il n'y a pas d'autre critère, de critère objectif.

(*Les Belles Images*, pp. 94-95.)

This irreverent representation of the conversation conveys the jostling of the guests for space to speak. Incoherence is exacerbated as towards the end of the paragraph the conversation seems to split into two parallel conversations happening simultaneously, the final comment apparently a response to an opinion expressed six inputs earlier, or perhaps it is simply the comment of someone unable to force their way into the conversation until now. Unorthodox punctuation (most commas are omitted within what I take to be individual utterances or contributions to the conversation), adds to the impression of speed. The text races on until a fervent remark from M^{me} Thiron stops everyone in their tracks and the text is brought to an abrupt halt. Not for long, it appears: 'Puis ils repartent...' (p. 95); this time, Laurence does not bother even to listen. The representation of dialogue at the new Year's Eve party is equally unsettling/ disorienting

for readers. Again, dialogue is incorporated into the text with no typological clues:

‘Brouhaha, bruit de vaisselle, c’est délicieux, servez-vous mieux’ (p. 145). The text makes it clear that there is nothing to choose between dialogue and the clatter of crockery. Once more, readers are dependent on Laurence’s attention and it is not sustained for long. The dialogue that is about wine (p. 145), when Laurence’s thoughts drift to last year’s party and to Lucien, has shifted to astrology by the time Laurence tunes into the conversation again. In this section of the text too, dialogue is fragmented. The representation of a snatch of conversation between Laurence’s father and Dufrène about literature and art consists of the former’s utterance in direct speech, intercalated with Laurence’s observations (new paragraph) and then Dufrène’s response in elliptical free direct discourse (new paragraph). His response is not distinguished from the rest of the long paragraph in which it is subsumed: ‘L’abstrait ne se vend plus; mais le figuratif non plus, crise de la peinture, que voulez-vous, il y a une telle inflation. Rabâchages. Laurence s’ennuie’ (p. 150).⁴⁵

Incoherence also derives from the fact that the text is multi-layered. Repeatedly, Laurence distances herself to make an observation then distances herself again to comment on her observation, then again to comment on her comment. This is disconcerting for readers. Encountering such layering in the text, this ‘jeu de miroirs’, with its concomitant contradictoriness, readers will share Laurence’s uncertainty and ultimately, her distress. Multi-layering is conspicuous in Laurence’s reflections on how

⁴⁵ The distinction between dialogue and narrative is also blurred on p. 32 where the representation of Laurence’s conversations with Lucien have a pantomime quality: ‘Ensuite, que d’agitation! Il me poursuivait, il pleurait, je cédaï, il rompaï, je souffraï, je cherchais partout la Giulietta rouge, je me pendais au téléphone, il revenait, il suppliaï : quitte ton mari, non jamais mais je t’aime, il m’insultait, il repartait, j’attendais, j’espérais, je désespérais, nous nous retrouvions, quel bonheur, j’ai tant souffert sans toi, et moi sans toi : avoue tout à ton mari, jamais...’; ‘Discussion trop connue: tu ne veux plus me voir, mais si je veux, comprends, je ne comprends que trop...’. See also pp. 66-67 where Jean-Charles’s remarks on architecture are interrupted by a whole page of Laurence’s reflections on relationships and her marriage before they begin again, only to be interrupted immediately by the doorbell ringing.

her mother is perceived. She rejects the view that Dominique owes her successful career to Gilbert and goes on:

Ils disent aussi, Gisèle Dufrène le pense, que maman a mis le grappin sur Gilbert par intérêt: cette maison, ses voyages, sans lui elle n'aurait pas pu se les offrir, soit; mais c'est autre chose qu'il lui a apporté; elle était tout de même désespérée après avoir quitté papa (il errait dans la maison comme une âme en peine, avec quelle dureté elle est partie aussitôt Marthe mariée); c'est grâce à Gilbert qu'elle est devenue cette femme tellement sûre d'elle. (Évidemment, on pourrait dire...)
(*Les Belles Images*, p. 9.)

In this example, the intrusion of a memory breaks up the text. Inconclusiveness is heightened as Laurence's thoughts are interrupted by the return of Hubert and Marthe from their walk in the forest. Likewise, multi-layering characterises the text as Laurence and Jean-Charles drive away from Feuverolles and discuss Gilbert. Laurence's response to Jean-Charles's observation that it is natural she should dislike Gilbert, is marked by plurality: '— Mais si, je l'aime bien. (L'aime-t-elle ou non? elle aime tout le monde.) Gilbert ne pérore pas, c'est vrai, se dit-elle. Mais personne n'ignore qu'il dirige une des plus grandes sociétés de machines électroniques du monde [...]' (p. 18). Multi-layering can obscure the boundary between the real and the imaginary. Indeed, they become conflated as Laurence is at once observer and participant, subject and object, in what might be a scene from an advertisement that is cut through by the advertising text she is thinking up:

Quelle jolie image publicitaire, promettant — au profit d'un marchand de meubles, d'un chemisier, d'un fleuriste — la sécurité, le bonheur. Le couple qui marche sur le trottoir, longeant le parapet dans le doux bruissement des arbres, contemple au passage l'intérieur idéal: sous le lampadaire, l'homme jeune et élégant dans son pullover en angora qui lit une revue d'un air attentif; la jeune femme assise à sa table, un stylo en main, l'harmonie des noirs, des rouges et des jaunes si bien assortis (heureux hasard) aux rouges et aux jaunes des dahlias. Tout à l'heure, quand je les ai cueillis, c'était des fleurs vivantes. [...] *Avec des panneaux de bois vous alliez à l'élégance citadine toute la poésie des forêts.* [...] La lumière éclabousse les vitres, elle éclaire brutalement les amoureux enlacés, image du passé pour moi qui suis l'image de leur tendre avenir, avec des enfants qu'ils devinent endormis dans des chambres du fond. *Des enfants se glissent à l'intérieur d'un arbre creux et ils se trouvent dans une ravissante chambre aux panneaux de bois naturel.* Idée à suivre.

A similar effect is achieved at the point in the text where Laurence finds

Dominique devastated after a violent confrontation with Gilbert:

Gilbert a sonné à dix heures, elle a cru que c'était le concierge, elle a ouvert. Patricia a tout de suite été pleurer dans les bras de Gilbert, et Lucile criait, il a refermé la porte derrière lui d'un coup de pied, il caressait les cheveux de Patricia, si tendrement, avec une voix apaisante, et là dans l'antichambre il l'avait insultée, giflée, il l'avait saisie par le col du peignoir bleu et traînée dans la chambre.

(Les Belles Images, p. 124.)

The text acquires an hallucinatory quality as two narratives are blended in one, the receipt of the letter and Gilbert's visit. The passage is marked by abrupt shifts in tone, a convulsive rhythm. Reported in the third person, the events are, nevertheless, implicitly recounted by Dominique herself. (The account is enclosed between '[Dominique] parle d'une voix qui n'appartient à personne' and 'La voix de Dominique s'étouffe'.) Thus the narrative situation that prevails in the novel as a whole is paralleled here in this narrative within a narrative.

A further example of multi-layering translates Laurence's inner conflict. In this passage she is recalling the moment during the family meal when she was forced to recognise her powerlessness in the face of the united opposition of everyone else:

Son père et Dominique l'ont dit ensemble: Alors? Hubert a hoché la tête, d'un air entendu. Laurence s'est obligée à manger, mais c'est alors qu'elle a eu le premier spasme. Elle se savait vaincue. On n'a pas raison contre tout le monde, elle n'a jamais été assez arrogante pour penser ça. (Il y a eu Galilée, Pasteur, et d'autres que nous citait M^{lle} Houchet. Mais je ne me prends pas pour Galilée.) Donc à Pâques — elle sera guérie, bien sûr, c'est l'affaire de quelques jours, on se dégoûte de manger pendant quelque jours et forcément ça finit par se tasser — ils emmèneront Catherine à Rome. L'estomac de Laurence se crispe. Elle ne pourra peut-être pas manger avant longtemps.

(Les Belles Images, p. 175.)

As Laurence is torn by painful emotions so too the text is divided against itself.

Laurence's anguish is manifest.

The passages I have been quoting to illustrate the incoherence that is the product of fragmentation and multi-layering, make it clear that the use of brackets and dashes and the use of ellipses and silences and breaks in tone have been instrumental in disrupting the text and fostering incoherence in *Les Belles Images*. Moving closer to the text as it were, I want now to focus specifically on these textual strategies. On a typographical level, the markers, (), —, and ..., conspicuously fracture the text. Virtually no page of the novel is without them. With regard to meaningfulness and madness, they function in a number of different ways.

The narrative is disrupted by Laurence's observations that are frequently separated from the rest of the narrative by brackets or dashes. However, there is no consistent pattern. Not all asides are isolated typographically and comments that appear in brackets at one point in the narrative may appear without brackets at another. On the whole, it appears that asides between dashes are informative, they are often stage directions, or clichéd interjections, whereas brackets tend to contain more emotionally charged memories and intimate thoughts, feelings and ideas that have no place in Laurence's milieu. A significant proportion of the parentheses are questions which adds to the tentative tone of the text. However, once more, there is no consistency and exceptions to the pattern I am suggesting are easily found.⁴⁶ Perhaps that is the

⁴⁶ Examples of the use of dashes and brackets in *Les Belles images*, some of which conform to the schema proposed and some of which do not:

- ✓ 'Tout en se recoiffant dans la chambre de sa mère, — drôlement joli ce rustique espagnol — Laurence fait un dernier effort [...].' (p. 15)
- ✓ 'Ils avaient beaucoup dansé ensemble — il danse très bien — ils s'étaient embrassés [...].' (p. 31)
- ✓ '— Non merci. — Elle a la gorge nouée. — Qu'est-ce qui se passe?' (p. 45)
- ✓ 'Il ne viendra pas à Feuverolles ce week-end. — La voix persiflante vibre de haine: — Il me plaque, quoi!' (p. 49)
- ✗ '— Qu'est-ce que les autres ont que je n'ai pas? —' (p. 7)
- ✗ 'Est-ce que j'aime Jean-Charles — ai-je aimé Lucien — d'amour?' (p. 67)
- ✗ 'Et le fait est que des gens se tuent — il a demandé des bananes et une serviette — parce qu'il existe justement quelque chose de pire que la mort.' (p. 85)
- ✓ [Dominique talking about her ex-husband] 'S'il était mystique [...] je comprendrais. (Mais non, pense Laurence.)' (p. 15)

important point. Readers seek to impose a pattern, to make sense of the text only to be repeatedly thwarted and frustrated as the pattern they expect to find is upset. They encounter a disrupted text and the disruption itself resists order and logic.

Readers' expectations can be disappointed to dramatic effect. For example, when Jean-Charles is determined to end Catherine's friendship with Brigitte, a comment that we might have anticipated would appear in brackets erupts directly into the text: 'Du cheval! ça c'était une idée formidable; même affectivement. Remplacer une amie par un cheval!' (p. 172). It is as if Laurence's anger towards Jean-Charles is so intense that it cannot be contained within brackets, it has broken through all Laurence's defences. The exclamation marks (relatively rare in *Les Belles Images*) add to the impression of a surge of powerful emotion.

Notwithstanding the instability of the patterns of parentheses in the text, their use gives rise to a number of interesting conjectures. The use of brackets can be linked with Laurence's sense of alienation. Her apartness is reproduced on a textual level, not all her thoughts can be incorporated in her narrative. I have suggested that the asides in brackets tend to be more emotionally charged which fits in with Freud's belief that obsessional or unthinkable thoughts can be faced without affect because they are isolated or bracketed off.⁴⁷ It may be that, on occasion, Laurence brackets off the

✓ '(Pas de gêne, pas de mauvaise conscience, pas de délectation morose.)' (p. 69)

✓ '— Oui je lui ai ressemblé [à Catherine], dit Laurence. (Me ressemblera-t-elle?)' (p. 105)

✓ 'Mais je ne t'aime plus d'amour. (L'ai-je jamais fait? Ces mots ont-ils un sens?)' (p. 110)

* '[...] elle s'étonne que ce soit si important et un hasard. Sans raison spéciale. (Mais tout est ainsi.)' (p. 67)

* '(elle a dit qu'elle avait mangé avec les enfants, elle ne pouvait rien avaler)' (p. 137)

* '[...] se battant entre eux comme des kriss malais dans un tiroir fermé (si on l'ouvre, tout est en ordre).' (p. 179)

In these latter examples the use of brackets adds an emotional edge to otherwise seemingly neutral interpositions.

⁴⁷ 'Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety', (1926), *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XX (1925-1926), pp. 87-175 (pp. 119-21). In his discussion of the technique of isolating, a variation of repression, Freud argues that in obsessional neurosis, a traumatic experience cannot be forgotten as it can be in hysteria. Instead, 'it is deprived of its affect and associative connections are

painful and unstabilising, that in this way she protects herself. This idea finds some support in the distribution of brackets in the narrative. In the final chapter of *Les Belles Images*, there are significantly fewer parentheses. It is in this chapter that Laurence faces her disappointment and so pain and affect are no longer bracketed off. What was repressed becomes conscious and is therefore included in narrative. As Nicole Ward Jouve said of Hélène Cixous's texts, *Les Belles Images* might be said to display 'the inner logic of a psychoanalytic cure'.⁴⁸

At other times, brackets and dashes are a way of indicating intonation, they introduce voice into the text. It is not only the case that we 'hear' Laurence's voice in the narrative. The intonation of voices she hears is marked in the text too. The cadence of Thirion's speech, for instance, is patent:

— Qu'est-ce que je pense de mes consœurs, petite madame? dit-il à Gisèle. Le plus grand bien; beaucoup sont des femmes charmantes et beaucoup ont du talent (en général ce ne sont pas les mêmes). Mais une chose est sûre: jamais aucune ne sera capable de plaider aux Assises. Elles n'ont pas le coffre, ni l'autorité, ni — je vais vous étonner — le sens théâtral nécessaires.

(*Les Belles Images*, p. 99.)

Ellipsis as well, is a disruptive strategy that functions in a number of different ways in the text. In every case, ellipsis disrupts the narrative and creates blanks/ empty spaces in the text, spaces where meaning, unexpressed, can expand. It opens up the text. Ellipsis is a device that enhances the subjective realism of the text. It can simply mark the interruption of Laurence's thoughts by an event in the story. For example, in the opening scenes at Feuverolles: '(Évidemment, on pourrait dire...)/ Hubert et Marthe reviennent de la forêt [...]' (p. 9); or on a later occasion at Feuverolles when Laurence's

suppressed or interrupted so that it remains as though isolated and is not reproduced in the ordinary processes of thought' (p. 120).

⁴⁸ Ward Jouve, Nicole, 'Hélène Cixous: From Inner Theatre to World Theatre' in *White Woman Speaks with Forked tongue: Criticism as Autobiography*, ed. by Nicole Ward Jouve, London: Routledge, 1990, pp. 91-100 (p. 94), quoted in Shiach, Morag, *Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing*, London: Routledge, 1991.

musings over her feelings for Jean-Charles are interrupted: '[...] la tendresse: si elle pouvait l'avoir retrouvée pour toujours... La voix de Dominique l'arrache à sa rêverie' (p. 92).⁴⁹ Ellipsis repeatedly marks Laurence's, or another character's, breaking off one train of thought to pursue another. Laurence represents to herself how Dominique might cope with Gilbert's rejection then imagines forewarning her mother: 'Elle se jettera dans le travail, elle prendra un nouvel amant... Et si j'allais moi-même la prévenir, tout de suite?' (p. 48). Laurence is paralysed by indecision and fear, 'immobile, au volant de sa voiture' (p. 48). Later, Gilbert is informing Laurence that he is going to disillude Dominique and tell her about his impending marriage to Patricia when his chain of thought is deflected: '—Je rentre à Paris ce soir... — Le visage de Gilbert s'illumine: — Écoutez donc; je suis en train de me demander [...]' (p. 96). Correspondingly, ellipsis marks a character's breaking off a train of thought to speak as when Laurence leaves off her appraisal of Dominique's character to urge her mother to get ready to go out: 'On la prend pour une femme de tête, maîtresse de soi, efficace.../ — Habille-toi, répète Laurence. Mets des lunettes noires et je t'emmène déjeuner quelque part [...]' (p. 125). Similarly, ellipsis represents the way in which, in conversation, not all utterances are completed. This occurs for instance when Jean-Charles tells Laurence a story he thinks will appeal to her father. Laurence's reply, '— Oui, papa aimera ça...' captures the openness of informal speech (p. 91). Likewise, the way Laurence does not conclude her retort to Gilbert's request that she be there to support Dominique once he has informed her of his plans to marry, accords with Laurence's angrily walking away: '— Pour l'empêcher de se descendre en laissant un mot où elle dirait pourquoi? Ça ferait mauvais effet, du sang sur la robe blanche de Patricia.../ Elle s'éloigne' (p. 97). The way interlocutors constantly interrupt each other is also marked by ellipsis. This is

⁴⁹ For further examples see pp. 108 and 156.

particularly the case when strong convictions and emotions are involved. Marthe desperately wants Laurence to allow Catherine to take her first communion and when Laurence explains that they had Catherine baptised only to please Jean-Charles's mother who is now dead, Marthe cuts off Laurence: '[...] maintenant qu'elle est morte.../ —Tu prends une grave responsabilité en privant ta fille de toute instruction religieuse' (p. 75). When Laurence's father fails to support her view that it is normal to be 'tourneboulé' (upset) at Catherine's age and that she should be allowed to remain friends with Brigitte, Laurence's dismay and anger lead her to interrupt his pronouncements: 'Si la psychologue la trouve désaxée.../ — Mais tu ne crois pas aux psychologues! (p. 174). The final way in which ellipsis promotes subjective realism is by marking a pause, as when Jean-Charles asks Laurence if she is ready, '«Tu es prête?...» (p. 85). In all these cases, ellipsis heightens ambiguity, creating a space for the unspoken in the text.

At other comic moments in the narrative, ellipsis is used to cut off potentially endless repetition, more of the same. See for example the point where Laurence remembers the early days of her relationship with Lucien: 'Tous ces aller et retour et toujours retomber au même point...' (p. 32). The suggestion is that, were it not broken off, the parodic representation of Laurence's affair with Lucien might continue. Likewise, ellipsis implies the endlessness and also the predictability of the Feuerverolles guests' conversation: 'Puis ils repartent...' (p. 95). It is as if the text is turning its back on what they are saying. Once more, ellipsis opens up a space in the narrative.

Ellipsis leaves room for the unexpressed and inexpressible. Thoughts may not be completed because they are too emotionally charged (with Jean-Charles, Laurence says, 'j'ai retrouvé aussi cette douceur plus secrète que j'avais connue jadis, assise aux pieds de mon père ou tenant sa main dans la mienne...' p. 22), or because they are too

frightening/ threatening (Laurence struggles to name her disappointment, 'Je suis jalouse mais surtout, surtout...' p. 179). Ellipsis repeatedly introduces ambiguity and uncertainty into the narrative. It adds to readers' uncertainty about the status of the comment: 'Dix idées à la minute...' prompted by Jean-Charles's utilitarian response to the kaleidoscope (p. 38). Ellipsis also translates Laurence's own uncertainty on a textual level. What should she do to preserve precious moments for her children? 'Les empêcher de grandir. Ou alors... quoi?' (p. 57).⁵⁰ Ellipsis suggests the tentativeness of Laurence's steps towards understanding: 'Il me manque quelque chose que les autres ont... A moins... A moins qu'ils ne l'aient pas non plus' (p. 83): 'Ce soupçon qui lui est venu l'autre jour... il était peut-être fondé' (p. 91). As she lies in bed trying to determine how she should go on, ellipses leave spaces in the text for a wealth of associations and meaning to expand and fill: 'Catherine [...] peut-être elle s'en sortira... De quoi? De cette nuit. De l'ignorance, de l'indifférence. Catherine...' (p. 181).

Not all breaks and silences in the text are marked by ellipses. Often signalled by an abrupt shift in tone, typographically unmarked breaks and ruptures in the text are unsettling and destabilising. This is the case in the following example that occurs early in the text. Laurence is at work thinking about how she is going to visit her father and about her relationship with her parents when the narrative thread is broken and readers are disoriented by the exclamation that begins the following paragraph. It takes them some time to realise that the narrative has moved on and that Laurence is trying to park:

C'est son père qu'elle aime le plus — le plus au monde — et elle voit Dominique bien davantage. Toute ma vie ainsi: c'est mon père que j'aimais et ma mère qui m'a faite.

«Espèce de mufle!» Elle a hésité une demi-seconde de trop [...].

(*Les Belles Images*, p. 33.)

⁵⁰ There is a similar example on p. 167: 'cette pensée que je retenais depuis... quand? m'a soudain transpercée'. In an interview with Jacqueline Piatier in *Le Monde*, Simone de Beauvoir draws attention to the fact that Laurence, 'un être de fuite', often does not finish her sentences, that 'ses conclusions restent en suspens'. 'Simone de Beauvoir Présente *Les Belles images*', *Le Monde*, 23 December 1966, p. 17.

Elsewhere, a silence in the text where the reader expects an indirect object creates an empty space which means nothing/ everything. The narrator is recounting an afternoon at Dominique's country house. As the talk turns to feminism, Laurence switches off: 'C'est comme la psychanalyse, le Marché Commun, la force de frappe, elle ne sait pas qu'en penser, elle n'en pense rien. Je suis allergique' (p. 99). Allergic to ...? The text begs the question. The reader is dizzy and disoriented, experiencing momentarily, feelings which evoke Laurence's breakdown, 'un vertige [...] un tourbillon' (p. 160), 'un gouffre' (p.167).

Ruptures in the text also signal Laurence's anxiety at the gulf she sees opening up between herself and her father. During the trip to Greece, she cannot agree with him but does not voice her disagreement about the poverty she sees ('je passais outre' p. 162). When she sees no sign of the 'austère bonheur' that her father is convinced rewards the poor (see pp. 84 and 162), her doubts are made explicit in the text: 'j'aurais bien voulu que papa me dise où exactement il avait rencontré des gens que leur dénuement comblait' (p. 162); '«Un austère bonheur»: ce n'est pas du tout ce que je lisais sur ces visages rougis par le froid' (p. 165). Laurence tries to explain to herself how her father could be so mistaken and supposes he has known Greece in the summer months when it must be 'plus gai'. However, when she holds out this possible mitigation to her father he rejects it: '— La Grèce n'est pas gaie, m'a dit papa avec un soupçon de reproche; elle est belle' (p. 167). Laurence's disillusionment is not expressed. There is a sharp break in the text. The narrative shifts abruptly to the visit to the museum. A similar rupture occurs earlier when Laurence does not challenge her father's unconvincing reasons for not signing petitions. Her disagreement and

disappointment are implicit in her silence that is reproduced on a textual level as the narrative unexpectedly moves to Athens (p. 166).

Moving on from how brackets, dashes, ellipses, ruptures and silences fragment, disrupt and destabilise the text of *Les Belles Images*, I now want examine how Simone de Beauvoir's texts are disrupted at a syntactical level. Syntax and punctuation, which establishes syntax, are important because, as Roger Fowler points out, 'syntax exercises a continuous and inexorable control over our apprehension of literary meaning and structure'.⁵¹ I construe transgressive (disordered and fragmented) syntax as a symptom of madness in the text. For, as Alice Jardine puts it, 'disturbances in the syntactic chain — the insurgence of rhythm and intonation into the ranks of grammatical categories for example — may be seen as an attack against the ultimate guarantor of our identity'.⁵²

'Monologue' is Simone de Beauvoir's most transgressive text and her most 'crazy'. That it is perceived as such is, to a considerable extent, owing to its eccentric syntax. It is in this text that her (mis)use of punctuation is flagrant. The text is not without punctuation but conventional rules of punctuation are flouted. A sense of disarray is generated as readers, largely deprived of boundaries normally marked by punctuation, attempt to make sense of the text. Sometimes, sentence-internal punctuation is missing. At other times, confusion arises because utterances that might normally be divided into two sentences or more are amalgamated, as when Murielle goes over Sylvie's suicide, seeking to disculpate herself: 'Oui, si j'étais de ces mères qui se lèvent à sept heures du matin on l'aurait sauvé moi je vis sur un autre rythme ce n'est pas criminel comment aurais-je deviné?' (p. 112). Whole sections of text lack punctuation. Readers encountering series of undifferentiated clauses must themselves

⁵¹ Fowler, Roger, *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*, London: Routledge, 1987, p. 243.

⁵² Jardine, *Pre-Texts*, p. 234.

impose order on the text. Disorientation is increased when clauses they might differentiate appear jumbled. This is the case for instance early in the text where Murielle imagines her family celebrating New Year without her. Noisy, festive people in the street ('Salauds! ils me déchirent les tympanes [...] p. 87) become conflated with Murielle's family ('Salauds! Ils me cavalent dans la tête je les vois je les entends' p. 88) and we read:

Je n'ai rien à foutre d'eux seulement qu'ils ne m'empêchent pas de dormir; on devient bon pour le cabanon on avoue tout le vrai et le faux qu'ils ne comptent pas là-dessus je suis une forte nature ils ne m'auront pas.

(*'Monologue'*, p. 88.)

I believe few readers are not forced to reread such utterances a number of times in order to make sense of them. In so doing, in repeating a fragment of text over and over, they replicate the obsessions that grip Murielle.

Elsewhere, disarticulated, disjointed syntax translates Murielle's distress. When she burns some incense because she imagines she smells vomit, she is reminded of Sylvie's funeral: 'Cette odeur d'encens c'est celle du service funèbre; les cierges les fleurs le catafalque: mon désespoir. Morte; c'était impossible!' (p. 104). The convulsive rhythms of this jerky syntax are unmistakable. In addition, series of short, asyntactic and disarticulated sentences suggest breathlessness, duplicating a rapid intake of breath. This can suggest Murielle's being rocked by powerful emotions. For instance when she remembers her father: 'Mon père m'aimait. Personne d'autre. Tout est venu de là' (p. 90). Or when she relives the pain of Sylvie's death: 'Sylvie est morte. Cinq ans déjà. Elle est morte. Pour toujours. Je ne le supporte pas' (p. 104). This example occurs just after the example of convulsive syntax quoted above and is immediately followed by Murielle's breaking down and uttering desperate pleas: 'Au secours j'ai mal j'ai trop

mal qu'on me sorte de là je ne veux pas que ça recommence là dégringolade non aidez-moi je n'en peux plus ne me laissez pas seule...' (p. 104).

Together, the lack of sentence-internal punctuation in much of the text and series of short, asyntactic utterances have the effect of hurrying readers along.⁵³ Murielle's racing thoughts and rapid speech are mirrored in the text. The representation of Murielle's telephone call to Tristan is exemplary. Murielle's voice leaves no room for Tristan's. Long, unpunctuated sentences reproduce her relentless onslaught. This is how Murielle puts her case to Tristan early in the call:

Toute la nuit j'ai réfléchi je n'avais rien d'autre à faire et vraiment je t'assure c'est anormal cette situation on ne va pas continuer comme ça enfin nous sommes toujours mariés quel gaspillage ces deux appartements tu revendrais le tien pour au moins vingt millions et je ne te dérangerai pas n'aie pas peur pas question de reprendre la vie conjugale on ne s'aime plus d'amour je m'enfermerai dans la chambre du fond ne m'interromps pas tu pourrais avoir toutes les nanas que tu voudrais je m'en torche mais puisqu'on est restés amis il n'y a pas de raison pour qu'on ne vive pas sous le même toit.

(‘Monologue’, p. 115.)

These thirteen lines of print without a pause appear in more than three pages of text without a paragraph break. Tristan's brief utterances appear in the text only as blanks (ellipses), their import is gathered only from Murielle's response. ‘Tu n'as pas le droit de priver [Francis] d'un vrai foyer... Mais si revenons là-dessus [...]’ (p. 115).

‘Quelquefois je me demande si ce n'était pas un coup monté... Oui un coup monté: c'est tellement incroyable ce grand amour et puis ce lâchage... Tu ne t'étais pas rendu compte? de quoi?’ (pp. 116-17).⁵⁴ Readers, like Tristan, can experience Murielle's monologue, her only weapon (*«Elle se venge par le monologue.»*), as an assault. It seems to pin us down.

⁵³ Readers attempting to read unpunctuated sections of text aloud can actually experience breathlessness as they are deprived of the breathing space punctuation provides.

⁵⁴ See also pp. 114, 117.

The effects identified in 'Monologue' are not unique to that text. Many of the same techniques are found in *Les Belles Images*. It, too, is characterised by contorted, transgressive syntax. Syntax is often broken and disarticulated, conveying pain and the pangs of Laurence's anguish.⁵⁵ One of the most striking examples occurs at the point in the text where Laurence realises the enormous responsibility she bears as a parent:

'Pointe de feu à travers le coeur. Anxiété, remords' (p. 135).⁵⁶ Contorted syntax recurs when Laurence remembers her depression five years earlier: 'Il me semblait n'avoir plus d'avenir: Jean-Charles, les petites en avaient un; moi pas; alors à quoi bon me cultiver?' (p. 43). And spasmodic syntax translates the intense emotion that destabilises Laurence as she watches the little Greek girl dance:

Une charmante fillette qui deviendrait cette matronne. Non. Je ne voulais pas. Avais-je bu trop d'ouzo? Moi aussi j'étais possédée par cette enfant que la musique possédait. Cet instant passionné n'aurait pas de fin. La petite danseuse ne grandirait pas; pendant l'éternité elle tournerait sur elle-même et je la regarderais. Je refusais de l'oublier, de redevenir une jeune femme qui voyage avec son père; je refusais qu'un jour elle ressemblât à sa mère, ne se rappelant même pas avoir été cette adorable ménade. Petite condamnée à mort, affreuse mort sans cadavre. La vie allait l'assassiner. Je pensais à Catherine qu'on était en train d'assassiner.
(*Les Belles Images*, p. 158.)

Disarticulation is especially marked during the culmination of Laurence's breakdown that has been building up throughout the novel. Laurence considers and rejects the idea that jealousy is at the root of her collapse: 'Oedipe mal liquidé, ma mère demeurant ma rivale. Électre, Agamemnon. Est-ce pour cela que Mycènes m'a tant émue? Non. Non. Billevesées' (p. 179). The repressed emotion that is giving rise to her inner conflict ('Le tiroir est refermé, les kriss se battent.') is her disappointment with her

⁵⁵ I am reminded of what Julia Kristeva says about Marguerite Duras in an interview with Susan Sellers: 'It's through being imperfect that Duras' sentences translate suffering rather than in the fireworks of musical and vocal pleasure we find in Joyce. For Duras, the expression of pain is painful'. *Women's Review*, Number 12, 19-21, p. 21.

⁵⁶ An alternative analysis of such syntax is to read it as sentences that are fragmented and the fragments separated by full-stops. See Liisa Dahl's discussion of James Joyce's expressionistic sentences in 'The Attributive Sentence Structure in the Stream of Consciousness Technique with Special Reference to the Interior Monologue used by Virginia Woolf, Joyce and O'Neill', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 68, 1967, 440-54, pp. 449-50.

father. Laurence's pain at recognising and naming her disappointment is conveyed by broken syntax, duplicating her breathlessness that is denoted in the text: 'Je suis jalouse mais surtout, surtout...' (p. 179). Laurence doses off, exhausted after confronting her pain and wakes to find Jean-Charles there. Her refusal to see the doctor is expressed in disarticulated syntax: '— Non jamais! Je ne me laisserai pas manipuler. Elle crie: — Non! Non!' (p. 180). Laurence's struggle to find a way forward is related in fractured, convulsive syntax:

Elle retombe sur son oreiller. Ils la forceront à manger, ils lui feront tout avaler; tout quoi? tout ce qu'elle vomit, sa vie, celle des autres avec leurs fausses amours, leurs histoires d'argent, leurs mensonges. Ils la guériront de son refus, de son désespoir. Non. Pourquoi non? Cette taupe qui ouvre les yeux et voit qu'il fait noir, à quoi ça l'avance-t-il? Refermer les yeux. Et Catherine? lui clouer les paupières? "Non"; elle a crié tout haut. Pas Catherine. Je ne permettrai pas qu'on lui fasse ce qu'on m'a fait. Qu'a-t-on fait de moi? Cette femme qui n'aime personne, insensible aux beautés du monde, incapable même de pleurer, cette femme que je vomis. Catherine: au contraire lui ouvrir les yeux tout de suite et peut-être un rayon de lumière filtrera jusqu'à elle, peut-être elle s'en sortira... De quoi? De cette nuit. De l'ignorance, de l'indifférence. Catherine... Elle se redresse soudain.

(*Les Belles Images*, pp. 180-81.)

This paragraph, quoted in full because it exemplifies Simone de Beauvoir's use of fragmented, disrupted syntax, begins with Laurence falling back on her pillow and ends with her sitting up, a reversal that marks a critical moment, a turning point for her. Laurence has found in herself the strength to challenge Jean-Charles and fight for her daughter. The intense emotions that are destabilising Laurence are paralleled in the unsettled, disrupted syntax of the passage.

The use of syntax in *L'Invitée* is not at first sight so radical. Nevertheless, it does contribute to the madness of the text. There is a typical sentence structure in *L'Invitée* that corresponds to the prevailing claustrophobic and obsessive atmosphere in the book. Given its reputation as a philosophical novel, there is a surprising absence of complex or compound sentences in *L'Invitée*. In the main, Simone de Beauvoir has not constructed

carefully argued sentences where clauses are linked by subordinating or coordinating conjunctions. Rather, her writing is paratactic⁵⁷, characterised either by simple sentences or by sentences made up of series of clauses, sometimes including subordinate or coordinate clauses, separated or linked by semi-colons and colons. I have in mind sentences like this one that occurs early in the novel, depicting Françoise in the Moorish café where she and Xavière are watching a dancer:

Françoise s'enfonça dans les coussins; elle aussi, elle était touchée par tout ce clinquant facile, mais ce qui l'enchantait surtout c'était d'avoir annexé à sa vie cette petite existence triste; car à présent, comme Gerbert, comme Inès, comme Canzetti, Xavière lui appartenait; rien ne donnait jamais à Françoise des joies si fortes que cette espèce de possession; Xavière regardait attentivement la danseuse, elle ne voyait pas son propre visage que la passion embellissait, sa main sentait les contours de la tasse qu'elle serrait, mais Françoise seule était sensible aux contours de cette main: les gestes de Xavière, sa figure, sa vie même avaient besoin de Françoise pour exister.

(*L'Invitée*, pp. 22-3.)

This very long sentence (twelve lines of print) is Gothic in its complexity, its convolutions. There is a sense in which these sentences could go on an on, clauses added to infinity.⁵⁸ These long uncoordinated sentences that characterize the text, harmonize with and contribute to the sense of suffocation and enclosure evoked. Moreover, such sentences resist any imposition of closure or conclusiveness. This syntax is in keeping with Françoise's sense of being overwhelmed and the illimitable peril that Xavière personifies. Two composite sentences evoke Françoise's fears that come to a head in the Spanish night-club; it is one of the climactic moments in the text:

Cette présence ennemie qui s'était révélée tout à l'heure dans un sourire de folle devenaient de plus en plus proche, il n'y avait plus moyen d'en éviter le dévoilement terrifiant; jour après jour, minute après minute, Françoise avait fui le danger, mais c'en était fait, elle l'avait enfin rencontré cet infranchissable obstacle qu'elle avait pressenti sous des formes incertaines depuis sa plus petite enfance; à travers la jouissance maniaque de Xavière, à travers sa haine et sa jalousie, le

⁵⁷ Parataxis is the placing of sentences, clauses, or propositions together without connectives.

⁵⁸ These sentences follow the principles of attributive structure as it is presented by Liisa Dahl. She argues that 'different additions can be made, because there is no definite subordination to which a new word should conform. The connection between the parts is "half open", for the starting point is the subject but it has no fixed termination' (p. 443).

scandale éclatait, aussi monstrueux, aussi définitif que la mort; en face de Françoise, et cependant sans elle, quelque chose existait comme une condamnation sans recours: libre, absolu, irréductible, une conscience étrangère se dressait. C'était comme la mort, une totale négation, une éternelle absence, et cependant par une contradiction bouleversante, ce gouffre de néant pouvait se rendre présent à soi-même et se faire exister pour soi avec plénitude; l'univers tout entier s'engloutissait en lui, et Françoise, à jamais dépossédée du monde, se dissolvait elle-même dans ce vide dont aucun mot, aucune image ne pouvait cerner le contour infini.

(*L'Invitée*, pp. 363-64.)

The accumulation of clause upon clause conveys a sense of relentlessness and inevitability. Just as Françoise is deciding to murder Xavière, the threat of engulfment she represents is evoked again:

En face de sa solitude, hors de l'espace, hors du temps, il y avait cette présence ennemie qui depuis si longtemps l'écrasait de son ombre aveugle; elle était là, n'existant que pour soi, tout entière réfléchie en elle-même, réduisant au néant tout ce qu'elle excluait; elle enfermait le monde entier dans sa propre solitude triomphante, elle s'épanouissait sans limites, infinie, unique; tout ce qu'elle était, elle le tirait d'elle-même, elle se refusait à toute emprise, elle était l'absolue séparation.

(*L'Invitée*, pp. 502-503.)

Again, just one long convoluted sentence builds up the menacing picture. The appositeness of the syntax that magnifies and mirrors a sense of submergence is incontrovertible.

At this point in the text, there is a distinct contrast between this long sentence applied to Xavière and a series of short sentences associated with Françoise: 'Seule. Sans appui' (p. 502); 'Il n'y avait plus personne. Françoise était seule./ Seule. Elle avait agi seule. Aussi seule que dans la mort' (p. 503). Françoise's emancipation from Xavière is figured on a textual level. Her solitude being 'enacted' by single-word sentences that stand alone.

Shorter and single-word sentences intrude elsewhere in the text too. Definitive and self-contained, they produce a spasmodic, jerky rhythm. A one-word sentence enclosed by longer, discursive sentences conveys the decisive nature of Françoise's

illness: 'Malade' (p. 222). Similarly, the word 'prisonnière' is isolated, imprisoned in the text (p. 261). A short asyntactic sentence placed after a long series of clauses evoking Montparnasse on the last evening before the war, Pierre's last evening in Paris before he is called up, conveys a sense of finality. It is like a door closing:

Ils s'assirent à la terrasse; le café était plein de gens, de bruit et de fumée; il y avait une bande de très jeunes gens qui chantaient; une nuée d'officiers en uniforme avait jailli du sol au cours de la nuit, ils s'étaient répandus par groupes autour des tables; des femmes les harcelaient avec des rires qui restaient sans écho. La dernière nuit, les dernières heures.

(*L'Invitée*, p. 475.)

A series of short sentences conveys fear and panic when Françoise realises that the key to her desk where she keeps her letters from Pierre and Gerbert is missing.

Elle vida nerveusement son sac. Le poudrier. Le bâton de rouge. Le peigne. Il fallait que la clef fût quelque part. Elle ne s'était pas séparée de son sac une minute. Elle retourna le sac, le secoua. Son coeur se mit à battre avec violence. Une minute. Le temps de porter le plateau de déjeuner de la cuisine dans la chambre de Xavière. Et Xavière était dans la cuisine.

(*L'Invitée*, p. 496-97.)

As the narrative continues, short sentences relate how Françoise runs home and finds that Xavière has read her letters, («Xavière sait.» (p. 497)). Speed and breathlessness and then irrevocability are suggested by a succession of short sentences.

L'Invitée is also marked by fragmented, disrupted syntax as the novel reaches its climax. After Françoise's confrontation with Xavière once she has read the letters, disarticulated and convulsive syntax accords with Françoise's anguish:

[Françoise] traversa le couloir, elle titubait comme une aveugle, les larmes brûlaient ses yeux: 'J'ai été jalouse d'elle. Je lui ai pris Gerbert.' Les larmes brûlaient, les mots brûlaient comme un fer rouge. Elle s'assit au bord du divan et répéta hébétée: 'J'ai fait cela. C'est moi.' Dans les ténèbres, le visage de Gerbert brûlait d'un feu noir, et les lettres sur le tapis étaient noires comme un pacte infernal. Elle porta son mouchoir à ses lèvres. Une lave noire et torride coulait dans ses veines. Elle aurait voulu mourir.

(*L'Invitée*, p. 499.)

She cannot bear the idea that Xavière will define her as maleficent: 'Chaque matin renaîtrait cette femme détestée qui était désormais Françoise. Elle revit le visage de Xavière décomposé par la souffrance. Mon crime. Il existait pour toujours' (p. 500).

Tortured, fragmented syntax betrays Françoise's pangs. Equally contorted and disruptive syntax marks her defiance and resolve to wipe out Xavière and, with her, Françoise's own guilt:

C'était une longue histoire. Elle fixa l'image. Il y avait longtemps on essayait de la lui ravir. Rigide comme une consigne. Austère et pure comme un glaçon. Dévouée, dédaignée, butée dans les morales creuses. Et elle avait dit : «Non.» Mais elle l'avait dit tout bas; c'est en cachette qu'elle avait embrassé Gerbert. «N'est-ce pas moi?» Souvent elle hésitait, fascinée. Et maintenant, elle était tombée dans le piège, elle était à la merci de cette conscience vorace qui avait attendu dans l'ombre le moment de l'engloutir. Jalouse, traîtresse, criminelle. On ne pouvait pas se défendre avec des mots timides et des actes furtifs. Xavière existait, la trahison existait. Elle existe en chair et en os, ma criminelle figure. Elle n'existera plus.

(*L'Invitée*, pp. 500-501.)

As Françoise looks at her reflection in the mirror, others' definitions of her are told in a series of asyntactic sentences. A question in the first person breaks into the text. The delayed past participle, 'fascinée' reproduces Françoise's hesitation as the text seems to falter. Xavière's definition of Françoise, a stark enumeration, erupts into the text. Syntax poses the existence of Xavière and the existence of Françoise's betrayal as equivalent since two clauses are simply placed in the same sentence with no conjunction ('Xavière existait, la trahison existait'). The displacement of the subject to the end of the final sentence of the paragraph heightens ambiguity and strengthens the identification Xavière, betrayal, guilt. The following one-sentence paragraph is decisive. Xavière, the betrayal and Françoise's guilt ('elle') will be extirpated in one move, just as their fate is decided in one short sentence.

Disrupted, contorted syntax in *L'Invitée* is mimetic. For example, it mirrors Françoise's lack of frankness when she speaks to Pierre about their relationship: '—

Peut-être, dit Françoise; on ne peut même pas parler de négligence, simplement' (p.

204). Similarly, Élisabeth's hysterical laughter and bewilderment is imitated by convoluted syntax:

— Ce n'est rien, dit Élisabeth. elle se tut. Elle avait été trop loin; j'ai été trop loin, se dit-elle; trop loin; mais alors ça aussi c'était donc fait exprès, ce dégoût cynique devant son personnage? Et ce mépris de ce dégoût qu'elle était en train de se fabriquer, n'était-il pas aussi comédie? Et ce doute devant ce mépris... ça devenait affolant, si l'on se mettait à être sincère, on ne pouvait donc plus s'arrêter?

(*L'Invitée*, p. 282.)

Echoes in the text ('trop loin') suggest her laughter dying away to be replaced by a

dizzying series of questions that fit into each other like ever receding reflections in

reflections. The series that might go on forever is ruptured in the same way as

Élisabeth's laughter was broken off. Also, mimetic syntax replicates what Françoise

defines as her lack of harmony, her awkward aridity:

Me voilà donc, pensa Françoise en se considérant avec un peu d'horreur; cette gaucherie maladroite existait à peine autrefois, quand elle n'y prenait pas garde: elle avait envahi maintenant toute sa personne et ses gestes, ses pensées mêmes, avaient des angles raides et cassants, son équilibre harmonieux s'était changé en stérilité vide; ce bloc de blancheur translucide et nue, aux arêtes râpeuses, c'était elle, en dépit d'elle-même, irrémédiablement.

(*L'Invitée*, p. 312.)

This long disarticulated, ungainly sentence, like Françoise, has sharp edges and

awkward angles. Contorted, fractured syntax parallels the anger and exasperation

Françoise feels towards Xavière who persists in cherishing an image of Pierre that

contradicts Françoise's own. She imagines bringing Xavière face to face with the

'truth':

Sa main se crispa sur la pochette de cuir noir. Jeter les lettres sur les genoux de Xavière. Dans le dégoût et la fureur, Xavière elle-même proclamerait sa défaite; il n'y avait pas de victoire possible sans son aveu. Françoise se retrouverait solitaire, souveraine, à jamais délivrée.

(*L'Invitée*, p. 495.)

Ambiguous syntax means the disgust and rage projected onto Xavière in a hypothetical future, are momentarily linked in readers' minds with Françoise and the angry gesture of throwing Pierre's letters into Xavière's lap.

I have shown how stability and coherence are undermined by Simone de Beauvoir's textual strategies and located the madness of the text in instability and incoherence. Madness is duplicated on a syntactical level too. Simone de Beauvoir's writing practice maintains readers in a state of tension and confusion and her texts are often demanding and uncomfortable. The rejection of a conception of identity as fixed and stable is in keeping with the idea that meaning is fluid and not to be enclosed. Ultimately, textual disruption and fragmentation subvert meaningfulness. In my final chapter I shall analyse how Simone de Beauvoir's writing practice throws the meaningfulness of language itself into question.

Chapter Four

Language and Meaning: *Les Belles Images*

Les Belles Images is the story of Laurence, the portrait of a woman facing a nervous breakdown, on the brink of madness. Simone de Beauvoir's textual strategies duplicate this madness in the text which structures the experience of madness, which is an effect of the text as a whole. The author creates a mad textual universe where readers share Laurence's experience, her helplessness and confusion, her 'désarroi'. This chapter will focus on one area of the mad textual universe created in *Les Belles Images* and concentrate on language and meaning. Madness is exemplified at those points in the text when language refuses to signify. The madness in the text is specifically that quality in the writing that unsettles meaning. As Laurence loses faith in language, so too, readers are forced into a position where their confidence in language and its meaningfulness is undermined. Laurence's struggle to make sense of the world, sense of who she is and what is happening to her, coincides with her struggle with language and is paralleled by readers' efforts to make sense of the text. The particular textual strategies I shall deal with are the opening up of meaning, the use of irony and enumeration and repetition. These strategies will be elucidated by an initial examination of Simone de Beauvoir's changing and contradictory attitudes to language and meaning. I do not wish to suggest that Simone de Beauvoir was an advocate of radical language. I am arguing that, as she struggled with language to make it express her meaning, in a way comparable to the women protagonists in *La Femme rompue* 'qui se débattent avec des mots',¹ the language Simone de Beauvoir produced actually undermined the (patriarchal) ideological assumptions about language and meaning that she, in part, subscribed to.

¹ Beauvoir, 'Prière d'insérer', reproduced in Francis and Gontier, *Les Écrits*, pp. 231-32.

Did Simone de Beauvoir believe that language is transparent, a straightforward sign system which allows us to say what we mean? Toril Moi argues that Simone de Beauvoir 'relies on Sartre's disastrously simplistic theory of language as a transparent instrument for action', that for her, language is 'the author's most reliable ally; a faithful workhorse that never fails to convey the desired message'.² Other critics share this judgment. Irène Pagès believes that Simone de Beauvoir's language 'is a rational language which never will allow itself to transgress logic' and that she 'uses current language as an unequivocal system referring to reality'.³ In her study of Simone de Beauvoir's memoirs Leah D. Hewitt writes:

For contemporary critics interested in the way writing ('écriture') plays havoc with identity, puts into question the subject of/ in language and disrupts oppositional thought, de Beauvoir's work is perhaps too readable, that is, naive. [...] De Beauvoir assumes with conviction the existence of the coherent ego that attributes meaning and occupies an unassailable position over language. For this powerful subject, unconscious desire has no place.

(*Autobiographical Tightropes*, p. 15.)⁴

Without doubt these views do find support in Simone de Beauvoir's writing and in interviews she gave, but I consider that her beliefs to do with language are more complicated and contradictory than the comments of these critics might suggest.

In her contribution to a 1964 debate, *Que peut la littérature?*, Simone de Beauvoir argues that true communication is possible and denies that language is a barrier though, significantly, she typifies language as opaque not transparent: 'je pense que je dis ce que je dis et qui est ce que vous entendez; il y a là un rapport vrai qui se crée à travers le langage: celui-ci est opacité mais c'est aussi un véhicule de

² Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, pp. 144 and 248.

³ Pagès, Irène, 'Simone de Beauvoir and the New French Feminisms', *Canadian Woman Studies: Les Cahiers de la Femme*, 6 (1), 1984, 60-62, p. 61.

⁴ Hewitt, Leah D., *Autobiographical Tightropes: Simone de Beauvoir, Nathalie Sarraute, Marguerite Duras, Monique Wittig, and Maryse Condé*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990, p. 15.

signification commun à tous et accessible à tous'.⁵ This contrasts sharply with the sentiment she expresses in *L'Existentialisme et la sagesse des nations* in 1948 to the effect that 'les trahisons du langage [...] empêchent toute communication véritable'.⁶ As for language in literature, Simone de Beauvoir is clear that, unlike scientific language where there exists 'un rapport univoque' between words/ signs and ideas, where 'le vocable est transparent', language in literature operates in a much more complex way.⁷

In her memoirs we read:

Il n'y a d'oeuvre littéraire que si le langage est en jeu, si le sens se cherche à travers lui, provoquant une invention de la parole même. [...] Une oeuvre qui se réfère au monde ne saurait être une simple transcription, puisqu'il n'est pas doué de parole. Les faits ne déterminent pas leur expression, ils ne dictent rien: celui qui les relate découvre ce qu'il a à en dire, par l'acte de le dire.

(*Tout compte fait*, pp. 162-63.)

Language in literature does not transmit a pre-existing meaning or represent reality, but it is involved in a process of signification, of creating meaning. Later in the same chapter of Simone de Beauvoir's memoirs, in the account she gives of an interview with Francis Jeanson, she confirms this view, affirming that 'le langage n'est pas la traduction d'un texte déjà formulé mais qu'il s'invente à partir d'une expérience indistincte'.⁸ In an interview with Ved Solverg Saetre, speaking about the *nouveau roman*, Simone de Beauvoir does not dismiss the movement out of hand, expressing her appreciation of the first novels of Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute and commenting on Sollers' *Drame* in the following terms:

Il décrit bien l'échec des mots devant la réalité qu'ils prétendent exprimer — c'est cet échec qui est intéressant. Ce thème est essentiel. Je ne l'ai jamais nié: les mots ne collent pas à la réalité — mais je dis les mots sont notre seul moyen de

⁵ In *Que peut la littérature?*, p.78. Sartre's contribution to the same debate appears in the same collection, pp. 107-27.

⁶ *L'Existentialisme et la sagesse des nations*, p. 28.

⁷ *Tout compte fait*, pp. 162-63.

⁸ *Tout compte fait*, pp. 166-67. The interview is published in Jeanson, Francis, *Simone de Beauvoir ou l'entreprise de vivre*, Paris: Seuil, 1966. A summary of the interviews that lasted four hours can be found in Francis and Gontier, *Les Écrits*, pp. 220-21. (Particularly interesting in connection with *Les Belles images* and Laurence's breakdown is Simone de Beauvoir's Freudian interpretation of her own psychology and Oedipus complex.)

communication et qu'on doit essayer d'établir une réalité à travers les mots bien que nous sachions quels pièges ils nous tendent.

(Interview with Ved Solverg Saetre, 1968.)⁹

Words fit reality imperfectly but they are our only tool. There is an undeniable tension in Simone de Beauvoir between, on the one hand, her conviction that she says what she means and that her meaning is unambiguously present in the words she uses and, on the other hand, her acknowledgement that meaning is the outcome of a struggle with language, a process. This tension is revealed in her fiction.¹⁰

With regard to women and language, her point of view certainly evolved in some respects over time. This is what she said to Nina Sutton in 1970: 'Une femme écrit-elle autrement qu'un homme? Seulement dans la mesure où sa situation est différente dans notre société actuelle. Un style littéraire ne fait que refléter la situation de l'écrivain et son rapport à sa situation'.¹¹ This can be compared with her comments in the preface to Anne Ophir's book published in 1976:

Nous rejettons la notion de littérature féminine parce que nous voulions parler à égalité avec les hommes de l'univers tout entier.

Nous le voulons toujours. Seulement la récente évolution du féminisme nous a fait comprendre que nous occupons dans cet univers une situation singulière et que, loin de renier cette singularité, il nous faut la revendiquer.

Est-ce à dire que pour écrire nous devons nous inventer un langage spécifique? Certaines d'entre nous le pensent : pas moi. On ne peut pas créer artificiellement un langage. Sur ce point les précieuses - dont le féminisme était très proche du nôtre - ont échoué; leur parole n'était comprise que dans les ruelles et s'est vite fanée. De même aujourd'hui, l'écriture au féminin n'atteint qu'un petit cercle d'initiées. Elle me paraît élitiste, destinée à satisfaire le narcissisme de l'auteur et non à établir une communication avec autrui.

⁹ Saetre, Ved Solverg, 'Interview with Simone de Beauvoir', *Vinduet*, 3, 1968, 196-201. Summary and extracts translated from Norwegian in Francis and Gontier, *Les Écrits*, pp. 233-34 (p. 233).

¹⁰ Ursula Tidd examines Simone de Beauvoir's disagreement with Sartre about language and writing and the representation of experience as it is exemplified in a debate they had one day at Saint-Cloud and repeatedly afterwards. She argues that Beauvoir concedes only reluctantly and provisionally to Sartre's view that in order to 's'appropriier les choses [...] il faut saisir leur sens et le fixer dans des phrases' which opposed her own view that 'la réalité déborde tout ce qu'on peut en dire; il fallait l'affronter dans son ambiguïté, dans son opacité au lieu de la réduire à des significations qui se laissent exprimer par des mots' (*La Force de l'âge*). See 'Simone de Beauvoir: Writing the Self, Writing the Life', unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Birmingham, 1997, pp. 266-68.

¹¹ Sutton, Nina, Interview with Simone de Beauvoir, 'Sartre and *The Second Sex*', *Guardian*, 19 February 1970, p. 11. Summary and extract in Francis and Gontier, *Les Écrits*, p. 245.

Je sais que le langage courant est plein de pièges. Prétendant à l'universalité, il porte en fait la marque des mâles qui l'ont élaboré; il reflète leurs valeurs, leurs prétentions, leurs préjugés. Il convient de n'en user qu'avec prudence.

(Preface, *Regards féminins: condition féminine et création littéraire*.)¹²

Whilst Simone de Beauvoir firmly rejects the notion of *écriture féminine*, these comments nevertheless reveal a more nuanced attitude to language. However, although Simone de Beauvoir's ideas on women and language did indeed evolve, they remained ill defined and, to some extent, contradictory. In 1979, in an interview with Alice Jardine, Simone de Beauvoir was still rejecting the theories of Hélène Cixous in the same terms.¹³ During the interview, Simone de Beauvoir talks of language as a universal instrument that can be used 'in a feminist perspective' and thus 'find itself changed in a feminist manner'. She reiterates the warning she gave in 1976. Although we 'can't not use this universal instrument', she argues, women must be aware that it incorporates masculine bias and must 'enrich their language, clean it up'. She dismisses the role of the unconscious in the production of language and with this the notion that women have a different relation to language than men. For her, language is social practice, a function of social situation. The interview at this point is confused and confusing. Alice Jardine rephrases her question about women's relation to language, trying to elicit, I believe, Simone de Beauvoir's views on women's (distinctive) entry into language and the Symbolic Order whereas her replies deal with the unconscious in language production at a less 'primitive' level. Simone de Beauvoir seems to flounder as she attempts to outline her position on women's and men's relationship to language; asked whether there should be a difference between feminine and masculine discourse, given their very different social situations at the present historical moment, Simone de

¹² Ophir, *Regards féminins*, pages not numbered. Preface reproduced in Francis and Gontier, *Les Écrits*, pp. 577-79.

¹³ Jardine, 'Interview', pp. 229-31.

Beauvoir replies that it depends on the topic as there are topics common to women and men and suggests that 'if a woman speaks of oppression, of misery, she will speak of it in exactly the same way as a man' (p. 231). She believes women speak differently only when they speak of their own personal problems as a woman, asserting that women are at once singular and universal. One could be forgiven for forming the impression that Simone de Beauvoir rejects Hélène Cixous' ideas without having properly understood them. She says as much herself: 'I can't read her, understand her'.¹⁴ Be that as it may, during this interview she is clearly uncomfortable discussing language in general and Hélène Cixous in particular and puts an abrupt end to the topic of conversation. The break is startling:

A.J.: So that means that you don't agree with Cixous when she says...

S.B.: No, not at all.

(Interview with Alice Jardine, 1979, p. 231.)

When Alice Jardine goes back to the topic a little later in the interview, Simone de Beauvoir expresses a somewhat different attitude, seeming to argue that a woman will necessarily write differently to a man and asserting that her own books could certainly not have been written by a man.¹⁵ She cannot, however, define how her texts are marked by her femininity/ femaleness. Simone de Beauvoir's ideas on women and language, the contradictions and blindspots inherent in her views find expression in her fiction where women are given a voice.

For Simone de Beauvoir's women protagonists, language is fraught with difficulties. Because they lose faith in language, because they do not use language unequivocally to establish the 'truth', we are invited to condemn the protagonists in

¹⁴ Jardine, 'Interview', p. 229. It is striking that Simone de Beauvoir uses the same verb as Hélène Cixous to describe women's relationship/attitude to language; as Alice Jardine points out, they both use the verb *voler* - Simone de Beauvoir to mean 'to steal' and Hélène Cixous in its double meaning, 'to steal' and 'to fly' (p. 230).

¹⁵ Jardine, 'Interview', p. 233.

Simone de Beauvoir's later texts. She is explicit that in 'La Femme rompue' Monique's guilt is evident in the way 'de page en page le journal se conteste'.¹⁶ The fact that the woman in 'L'Age de discrétion' is failed by language is a symptom of her breakdown. Murielle's monologue divorces truth from discourse and Simone de Beauvoir can see no outcome for her except madness or suicide.¹⁷ In *Les Belles Images*, Laurence's difficulties with language, her struggle to make words signify, is represented as a symptom of her disintegrating personality and mental collapse. However, as Toril Moi has argued in relation to 'La Femme rompue', the fact that the narrator constantly contradicts herself is not interpreted by modern readers as a sign of her guilt and blindness but rather as demonstration of the inadequacy of language and the unstable nature of meaning. Toril Moi suggests that 'La Femme rompue' 'may paradoxically — and quite unintentionally — come across as a far more "modern" text than any of Beauvoir's other writings'.¹⁸ I believe that the same tension related to language and meaning is to be found in *Les Belles Images*, in the other stories in *La Femme rompue* and can even be traced in her earlier fiction too, notably in *L'Invitée*. To some extent, almost all Simone de Beauvoir's texts undermine a patriarchal ideological position on

¹⁶ *Tout compte fait*, p. 175.

¹⁷ See *Tout compte fait*, p. 177. In Simone de Beauvoir's memoirs, hope is held out for the woman in 'L'Age de discrétion' as, in the end, she is able to talk to André again and as she never at any point loses 'l'amour de la vérité'. Failure is overcome. Remarks to do with *La Femme rompue* are ambiguous at this point in the memoirs. Simone de Beauvoir refers to the three stories as the first, second and third according to the order in which she comments on them in the memoirs ('La Femme rompue', 'Monologue', 'L'Age de discrétion') not according to the order in which they appear in *La Femme rompue* collection. Elizabeth Fallaize clarified which story Simone de Beauvoir's remarks about failure being overcome applied to, during the course of an interview (footnote 21, *The Novels*, p. 174). An added confusion is the fact that Simone de Beauvoir writes that in choosing to lie to themselves, Laurence and Muriel[le] 's'interdisent toute communication avec autrui'; this does not make sense as her comments deal exclusively with *La Femme rompue* at this point and we must assume that she means to write Monique and Murielle. This is especially the case in the light of comments made a page earlier when Simone de Beauvoir specifically contrasts the way Laurence and Monique behave: 'Laurence cherche timidement la lumière [...] tout l'effort de Monique tend à l'oblitérer' (p. 142).

¹⁸ Moi, 'Intentions and Effects', p. 78.

language, refusing to corroborate the view (that she shared to some extent) that language is an unequivocal sign system.

Jacques Derrida's and Julia Kristeva's and, to some extent Hélène Cixous's writing on language, despite Simone de Beauvoir's dismissal of the notion of women's writing, provide a useful theoretical framework for my discussion of the textual strategies that unsettle meaning in *Les Belles Images* and, in part, account for its radical, modern aspect. These are the textual strategies, the qualities that I am reading metaphorically as madness. My intention is to locate points of convergence between their theories about language and meaning and Simone de Beauvoir's writing practice.

For Derrida meaning is not present in words, rather meaning is produced through the 'free play of the signifier', the interplay between present and absent signifiers.¹⁹ His concept of *différance*, translated as both 'difference' and 'deferral' in English, expresses this view of meaning.²⁰ Meaning is never present, it is the outcome of an endless process of present and absent differences and is endlessly deferred. As meaning cannot be reduced to a single or fixed meaning there can be no 'transcendental signified' that confers meaning, no transcendental truth beyond language. Derrida rejects as logocentric (from the Greek word *logos* or 'word'), philosophies that are based on a transcendental signified, a belief that meaning is fully present in the Word. He argues that written texts in particular can always be read 'other'wise as language constantly evokes meanings that exceed, contradict or disrupt the intended meaning. As Terence Hawkes puts it, because there is a gap between the text and its 'meaning', 'a text can

¹⁹ For my account of Derrida's theories and indeed, my explanations of Cixous and Kristeva's analyses, I am indebted to Moi, *Sexual Textual Politics* and to Sellers, *Language and Sexual Difference*.

²⁰ Christopher Norris' comments about the term *différance* are interesting: 'Its sense remains suspended between the two French verbs 'to differ' and 'to defer', both of which contribute to its textual force but neither of which can fully capture its meaning. [...] *Différance* [...] offers in its own unstable meaning a graphic example of the process at work'. *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, London: Methuen, 1982, repr. 1986, p. 32.

have no *ultimate*, final meaning'.²¹ There can be no comforting closure. Derrida advocates a mode of writing that does not seek to impose a single meaning but incorporates multiple meanings.

Derrida's theories amount to a critique of binary logic, binary oppositions which have shaped Western metaphysics. Cixous argues that the hierarchical binary oppositions that underlie the patriarchal value system, can always be traced back to the fundamental male/ female opposition where woman systematically incorporates the negative pole. Toril Moi sums up Cixous's theoretical project as 'the effort to undo this logocentric ideology' that silences and oppresses women.²² For Cixous, 'la critique du logocentrisme [est] inseparable d'une mise en question du phallogentrisme', that is the system that privileges the phallus as the symbol or source of power.²³ *Écriture féminine* is writing that subverts patriarchal binary schemes and opens up meaning. Cixous, like Derrida, believes that attempts to fix the meaning of a text are not only impossible but also reductive.

The active inclusion of plural meanings within a text, that is both in the multiplicity of meanings within each word or phrase or other language unit and through intertextuality, the transposition into the text of meanings from other texts, is seen by Kristeva as one of the ways the semiotic disrupts symbolic language.²⁴ Furthermore, the semiotic energy present in the rhythms and movement of a poetic text can, she argues, return readers to the rhythms, movement and echolalias of the *chora* affording readers a total pleasure ('*jouissance*') that is 'polymorphic, polyphonic, serene, eternal,

²¹ Hawkes, Terence, *Structuralism and Semiotics*, London: Methuen, 1977, repr. 1986, p. 148.

²² Moi, *Sexual/ Textual Politics*, p. 105.

²³ Cixous, *Prénoms de personne*, Paris: Seuil, 1974, p236.

²⁴ For the distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic, see my 'Introduction'. A useful definition of intertextuality is provided by Roudiez, p. 15.

unchangeable'.²⁵ Toril Moi sums up the *chora* as a rhythmic pulsion perceptible as contradictions, meaninglessness, disruption, silences and absences in the symbolic language. Kristeva contrasts women's and men's experience of language and the *chora*, suggesting that women's strong links with the pre-Oedipal mother mean that many women are open to allowing the 'spasmodic force' of the unconscious to disrupt their language. However, if women are susceptible to surges of semiotic energy, they also are more vulnerable, more at risk. Susan Sellers provides the following summary of Kristeva's argument:

Whereas men's return to the semiotic *chora* is brought about through the explosion of rhythms and echolalias we have known as children which act as comforting reminders of early plenitude or, alternatively, give rise to laughter and symbolic play, Kristeva suggests that for women reactivating these rhythms threatens the tenuous nature of our symbolic construction, rendering us 'ecstatic, nostalgic or mad'.

(Language and Sexual Difference, pp. 104-105.)

Women who let the semiotic disrupt their language expose themselves to the danger of madness.

A close reading of *Les Belles Images* will allow us to pinpoint where the theories of language and meaning I have just outlined intersect with Simone de Beauvoir's writing practice. I want to examine how *différance* operates in the text, to consider how plurality and subversion contribute to madness in the text. Given the fact that the disruption of symbolic language (that I have read metaphorically as madness) poses a (greater) threat to women, it might be expected that semiotic energy will break into the text, that is into Laurence's voice, at those points where her psychic stability is most at risk. It is also the case that the rhythms, movement and echolalias of the *chora*, generated by Simone de Beauvoir's use of enumeration and repetition, are found at

²⁵ Quoted in Sellers, p. 103. 'Echolalia' is a term that conveys the ceaseless echoing back and forth between signs. See Hawthorn, Jeremy, *A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory*, London: Arnold, 1992, p. 72.

moments when Laurence's lost plenitude is evoked. It is also possible to identify them at certain points where humour disrupts the narrative.

The text of *Les Belles Images* exposes the problematic nature of meaning, of the relation between signifier and signified, exemplifying a rejection of logocentrism. It embodies/ enacts the inadequacy of language that forms an important strand in the narrative. The text of *Les Belles Images* includes a metacommentary on language. Laurence finds herself in a world where meaning, for her, is never fixed, always uncertain. Unlike those around her, Laurence cannot take the meaning of words for granted. This is true well before her breakdown. Reflecting that children should be protected from images that might upset them, she distances herself from this idea and makes the comment: 'Réflexion abjecte. Abjecte : un mot de mes quinze ans. Mais que signifie-t-il?' (p. 30). Likewise, when Gilbert informs Laurence that he intends to end his seven year relationship with her mother, '[Laurence] entend des mots qui restent suspendus en l'air, dénués de sens [...]' (p. 46). Her attitude to language contrasts with her father's. When he speaks of love, Laurence affirms: 'Aimer d'amour; vraie valeur. Pour lui ces mots ont un sens' (p. 35). By implication, these words lack meaning for Laurence. When she ends her relationship with Lucien, she uses the word 'love' without knowing exactly what she means: 'Mais je ne t'aime plus d'amour. (L'ai-je jamais fait? Ces mots ont-ils un sens?)' (p. 110). Even when words do mean something, Laurence is aware that meanings are not necessarily shared. Were she to read the books her daughter Catherine reads, she could not know what they mean to her: 'De toute façon, les mots n'auraient pas le même sens pour moi que pour elle' (p. 25). She realises that 'il nous [Laurence and Catherine] manque un langage commun' (p. 77). The same is true of all signs, not only of language. Laurence compares her own understanding of television images with her daughter's:

Pouvoir de l'image. «Les deux tiers du monde ont faim», et cette tête d'enfant, si belle, avec les yeux trop grands et la bouche fermée sur un terrible secret. Pour moi c'est un signe : le signe que se poursuit la lutte contre la faim. Catherine a vu un petit garçon de son âge, qui a faim.

(*Les Belles Images*, p. 29.)

Similarly, the meaning of the flowers that Jean-Charles sends her after a quarrel is not at all transparent: 'Un bouquet, c'est toujours autre chose que des fleurs [...]. Des roses rouges: amour ardent. Justement non. [...] Ce n'est pas un voluptueux flamboiement de passion; mais elles sont belles et si on les a chargées d'un message mensonger, elles en sont innocentes' (p. 136).

Thus discourse is reduced to words, empty words in which Laurence has no faith. Words refuse to signify for Laurence. When she gets home after the trip to Greece, even apparently straightforward questions are problematic for her. Asked whether she has had a good time, she gives the expected reply, 'formidable!', but cannot determine if she is telling the truth: 'Elle ne mentait pas, elle ne disait pas la vérité. Tous ces mots qu'on dit! Des mots...' (p. 170). She is neither truthful nor lying. The opposition is undermined and the nature of truth and even its existence are called into question. As Laurence's breakdown reaches its climax, language lets her down: 'Je n'ai pas de mots pour me plaindre ou pour regretter' (p. 153). She is left without a voice: 'Voici venir ce qu'elle redoute plus que la mort: un de ces moments où tout s'effondre; son corps est de pierre, elle voudrait hurler; mais la pierre n'a pas de voix; ni de larmes' (p. 176).²⁶

Although words may have no stable meaning, a subject excluded from language altogether is condemned to mental breakdown and madness.

Interestingly, happiness in *Les Belles Images* is associated with childhood when Laurence could look to her father to make words/ language meaningful. As an adult she

²⁶ Laurence's words are reminiscent of what Simone de Beauvoir writes in the epilogue to *La Force des choses*: 'il y a des heures si noires qu'il ne reste plus d'autre espoir que ce cri qu'on voudrait pousser' (p. 679).

is still willing to accept her father's definitions; during a discussion about art she realises: 'Ce qu'il dit là, elle l'a pensé souvent : enfin je ne le pensais pas avec ces mots; mais maintenant qu'ils sont dits elle les reconnaît pour siens' (p. 150). Travelling with her father in Greece, Laurence's regression is exemplified by her dependence on him in relation to language: 'J'aimais retrouver devant cet alphabet le mystère enfantin du langage et que, comme autrefois, le sens des mots et des choses me vînt par lui' (p. 154). This is explicitly the happiest moment in the book. It is no coincidence that happiness is linked with the illusion of transparency in language, with a time when meaning seemed unproblematical. And in the present of the narrative, Laurence comprehends the word 'happiness'; it is as if the word incorporates meaning:

[...] Papa a commandé pour moi une boisson à la cerise, fraîche, légère, aigrelette, délicieusement puérile. Et j'ai su ce que voulait dire ce mot qu'on lit dans des livres: bonheur. [...] Cet accord d'un ciel bleu et d'un goût fruité, avec le passé et le présent rassemblés dans un visage cher et cette paix en moi, je l'ignorais — sauf à travers de très vieux souvenirs. Le bonheur: comme une raison que la vie se donne à elle-même. Il m'enveloppait [...].

(*Les Belles Images*, p. 155.)

In complete contrast, as Laurence experiences mental collapse and is forced to reassess her relationship with her father, language comes to be associated with pain and violence. Laurence is prostrate:

[...] terrassée par une galopade d'images et de mots qui défilaient dans sa tête, se battant entre eux comme des kriss malais dans un tiroir fermé (si on l'ouvre, tout est en ordre). [...] J'ai été *déçue*. Le mot la poignarde. Elle serre son mouchoir contre ses dents comme pour arrêter le cri qu'elle est incapable de pousser.

(*Les Belles Images*, pp. 179-80.)

Paradoxically, it is by naming her pain that she will recover from it. At the end of the book Laurence finds her voice.²⁷ Language is her weapon that she will use to silence others: 'Malgré elle, la voix de Laurence se monte, elle parle, elle parle, elle ne sait pas

²⁷ Until this point Laurence has failed to voice the disagreement she feels. See for example pp. 12, 15, 26, 41, 128, 156, 162, 166.

exactement ce qu'elle dit, peu importe, l'important est de crier plus fort que Jean-Charles et que tous les autres, de les réduire au silence' (p. 182).

In Simone de Beauvoir's textual universe words and silence are equally meaningful/less and both are contingent. The starving little boy in the poster has 'la bouche fermée sur un terrible secret'. Laurence anguishes about the effects of words/silence on Catherine: 'Les humeurs quotidiennes, les hasards d'un mot, d'un silence, toutes ces contingences qui devraient s'effacer derrière moi, ça s'inscrit dans cette enfant qui rumine et qui se souviendra, comme je me souviens des inflexions de voix de Dominique' (p. 135). Later she wonders, with reference to Jean-Charles: 'Est-ce qu'il ne sent pas entre nous le poids des choses non dites? non pas du silence, mais des phrases vaines [...]' (p. 140). Silence is redefined; it is not necessarily what is unspoken but can be what is spoken without meaning, sentences that signify nothing.

The problematic nature of meaning is further underlined as accepted definitions are called into question; Laurence wonders what being normal means. When Jean-Charles is advocating consulting a psychologist about Catherine, Laurence asks him, '— Tourner rond: qu'est-ce que ça veut dire? A mon avis ça ne tourne pas tellement rond chez les gens que tu juges normaux' (p. 132). Being 'normal' is also something she discusses with her father in Greece:

- Sans doute à toute époque il est normal d'être effrayé quand on commence à découvrir le monde.
- Alors, si on la rassure, on la rend anormale, ai-je dit.
- C'était une évidence et elle me foudroya. Sous prétexte de guérir Catherine... on allait la mutiler.

(*Les Belles Images*, p. 159.)

This identification of curing with mutilation recalls Laurence's response to the little Greek girl she had watched dancing; life and death are conflated: 'La vie allait l'assassiner' (p. 158).

Here, story meets text. So far, I have, in part, been discussing language/ meaning as theme in *Les Belles Images*. Now, just as the content of the book calls the meaningfulness of language into question, so too does the text itself. It repeatedly asserts the equivalence of opposites, thus undermining binary oppositions. Just as lying and truthfulness cancel each other out, so do 'completely different' and 'exactly the same' ('tout à fait différent, exactement pareil' pp. 7, 9, 50). and 'always' and 'never'; Laurence's anxiety is present and not present: 'En réalité, c'est là sans y être, c'est dans la couleur du jour. Elle y pense tout le temps, elle n'y pense jamais' (p. 75). The distinction between 'full' and 'empty' is subverted: 'Vie trop remplie? trop vide? Remplie de choses vides. Quelle confusion!' (p. 146). The effect is accentuated by repetition. Laurence attempts in vain to make sense of her existence, impose some order. By asserting the equivalence of opposites in this way, the text can epitomise Laurence's sense of unreality, her sense of existing at a distance. Speaking of the trip to Greece, Laurence can affirm: 'Je mangeais avec appétit et indifférence...' (p. 156). Such contradictory assertions can express a positive moment in the text as when Laurence has a feeling of wholeness and oneness with the world when the plane takes off for Greece: '[...] sous mes pieds s'étalent de blancs paysages qui m'éblouissent et qui n'existent pas. Je suis ailleurs: nulle part et partout' (p. 154).²⁸ Laurence is elsewhere, nowhere and everywhere; her strange, out of body experience is condensed in this undercutting of distinctions. The accumulation of statements of this kind creates an impression of strangeness and alienation for readers. The text is, in a sense, crazy. Placing together as complementary words which are usually defined as contradictory, involves redefining both terms and allowing meaning/ nonmeaning to emerge from the space between them.

²⁸ This is an echo and revision of Laurence's earlier affirmation that 'le monde est partout ailleurs, et il n'y a pas moyen d'y entrer' (p. 26). It is also an appropriation and valorisation of an earlier pejorative statement of Laurence's father's about tourists who 'ne sont nulle part, tout en étant partout' (p. 40).

Meaning not fully present in words themselves, not expressible by them, emanates from the blank of 'non-meaning' that exists in the spaces between them. In a sense it is unspoken, un-speakable.

The problematic nature of meaning is further accentuated by the use of irony. *Les Belles Images* is an ironic book.²⁹ Irony contributes to the creation of a mad textual universe in that it is a source of ambiguity in the text and an embodiment of the 'treacherous', 'slippery' nature of meaning; at the simplest level, irony is saying one thing whilst meaning another.³⁰ It foregrounds the discrepancy that exists between words and meaning and duplicates the gap between appearance and reality. It also involves a certain distancing, which, taken to its extreme, is a form of alienation. Readers, who are invited to collude with Laurence, the narrator, are thus implicated in her alienation from her environment. On another level, irony functions to distance readers from Laurence herself. Does irony suggest a contradiction since it involves control which is patently not an element of madness? Certainly, irony is a knowing form of defence. However, I am suggesting that 'madness' in the text is the outcome of the ambiguity and feelings of alienation created in readers by the use of irony, not an intrinsic quality of the irony itself.

How, then, are these effects of ambiguity and a heightened sense of alienation created? The irony in *Les Belles Images* is multi-layered. This layering, which accentuates Laurence's alienation, is rendered even more ambiguous by the je/ elle split which is at the heart of the narrative.³¹ Although much of the irony can be attributed to Laurence as narrator, Laurence as character is also ironic and, at times, sarcastic. From the very first page of the novel, irony is directed at Laurence's milieu. As Elizabeth

²⁹ The title *Les Belles images* is itself ironic and open to a multiplicity of interpretations.

³⁰ Irony can also be read as an inscription of hysteria in the text insofar as in hysteria the symptom appears to 'mean' one thing while it actually conceals another 'meaning'.

³¹ The je/ elle split is discussed in Chapter Three.

Fallaize says, as the novel opens, readers seek uneasily the source of the malicious remarks that undercut the description of Feuverolles and the guests' conversation.³²

Favourite butts for Laurence's irony are her sister and brother-in-law, Marthe and Hubert. The tone of Laurence's ironic asides inclines towards the cruel. Her portrait of Hubert is vicious and very funny:

Hubert allume sa pipe qu'il est bien le dernier homme en France à appeler «ma vieille bouffarde». Son sourire de paralytique général, son embonpoint. Quand il voyage il porte des lunettes noires: «j'adore voyager incognito.» Un excellent dentiste qui pendant ses loisirs étudie consciencieusement le tiercé.

(*Les Belles Images*, p. 9.)

Her contempt for him even intrudes into Laurence's account of the crucial family meal where Catherine's case is discussed and Laurence realises her complete isolation; she imagines Hubert is eating in silence because 'il devait combiner de tortueux échanges de porte-clés, c'est sa dernière lubie' (p. 174). As for Marthe, it is her religious faith that is met by Laurence's irony. She puts her sister's conversion down to her being married to Hubert and mocks the poses she adopts, like 'une sainte, ivre du joyeux amour de Dieu' (p. 9). When Marthe drops by to see Laurence 'à l'improviste', something Laurence has expressly asked her not to do, Laurence imputes this to the fact that 'elle obéit à des impulsions surnaturelles; elle est devenue très impérieuse depuis que le ciel l'inspire' (p. 74). Laurence is sarcastic to Marthe's face when she presumes to interfere in the way Laurence brings up Catherine. 'Il te reste toujours la ressource de prier pour elle', she tells her, refusing to relent and let Catherine take her first communion.

To what extent is it meaningful or possible to separate the two layers of irony, narrator and character? Sometimes Laurence the narrator is clearly directing irony at Laurence the character. Note the light, playful tone of this example occurring early in the book which will be marked by a progression to bitterness as Laurence reaches breaking

³² Fallaize, *The Novels*, p. 119.

point: 'il y a des jours comme ça où on se lève du mauvais pied, où on ne prend plaisir à rien! elle devrait avoir l'habitude' (p. 19). However, much of the time the distinction between these two levels of irony is latent rather than actual and is a source of ambiguity, particularly when the utterance in question may be free direct discourse. Readers, dependent on Laurence, have no way of knowing the status of the utterance and are left wondering, for example, whose anger and bitterness is being expressed, narrator's or character's, when they read: 'Suivre son bonhomme de chemin, sans dévier d'un pouce, défense de regarder à droite ou à gauche, à chaque âge ses tâches, si la colère te prend avale un verre d'eau et fais des mouvements de gymnastique. Ça m'a bien réussi, ça m'a parfaitement réussi [...]' (p. 132). Similarly, the status of the bitter irony evinced as the narrative recounts the moment when Laurence is forced to accept Jean-Charles' decision that Catherine should be separated from her friend, Brigitte, is ambiguous: 'Du cheval! ça c'était une idée formidable; même affectivement. Remplacer une amie par un cheval!' (p. 172). The fact that the interpolation is not in brackets or between dashes increases ambiguity. It suggests that the irony is Laurence the character's. However, a number of lines later this impression is contradicted to some extent as Laurence appears to have adopted Jean-Charles' point of view that once in Rome, 'elle ne pensera guère à son amie' and that with 'un peu de doigté, [...] l'an prochain elle l'aura complètement oubliée' (p. 173). Here, Laurence the narrator of her story (there is no indication at this point whether the story is being narrated in the first or the third person), may possibly be directing irony/ (self-) criticism at Laurence the character.

The retrospective narration of the final chapter of *Les Belles Images* allows Laurence (narrator) to be ironic at the expense of Laurence (character), exploiting the potential for dramatic irony. Laurence recounts how during a conversation with her

father about Dominique, she did not contradict his kindly estimation of the changes in her personality. The irony directed at herself is scathing: 'je ne voulais pas priver ma pauvre mère des bribes d'amitié qu'il lui accordait' (p. 157). Laurence's ironic response to her mother and father's behaviour before she learned of their reconciliation takes on a further level of irony in the context of Laurence's retrospective narration. Laurence, looking back at what has happened, is critical of the blindness and naivety her initial, ironic reaction displayed: '(Maman prenant goût aux réunions de famille! on aura tout vu! et la courtoisie de papa à son égard!)' (p. 173). Such free play with the status of utterances can be read as evidence of the expression of semiotic energy in the text.

At other times these layers of irony, narrator's and character's, are juxtaposed; Laurence as character is ironic, this implies a certain distancing, then Laurence as narrator distances herself even further and directs irony at Laurence as character, irony at her irony. Thus when Laurence is unable to concentrate on her work because she is worried about Catherine, we read: '«Voilà bien la condition déchirée de la femme qui travaille», se dit-elle avec ironie. (Elle se sentait bien plus déchirée quand elle ne travaillait pas).' (p. 28). This split and the acute dissociation it reveals are emblematic of the madness of the text.

There is a further level of irony based on complicity between the implied author and readers. Despite her reservations, Laurence is targetted along with Gilbert and others by the irony generated by the use of the mystifying/ distorting language of the technocratic bourgeoisie.³³ One of the most shocking examples is Gilbert's response to the suicide of a twelve-year old boy in prison: '«Des faux frais.» Gilbert expliquait

³³ Simone de Beauvoir writes about her intention to evoke the 'société technocratique' and to 'faire entendre ce qu'on appelle aujourd'hui son «discours»' in *Tout compte fait*, p. 172. There is also a reference to technocratic society in *Que peut la littérature?* where Simone de Beauvoir is disparaging about its optimism 'qui appelle la misère abondance et qui se sert de l'avenir comme d'un alibi' (p. 91). The transposition of meanings derived from other texts into *Les Belles images*, the process of intertextuality, is, for Kristeva, evidence of semiotic activity.

qu'en toute société il y a forcément des faux frais. Oui, forcément' (p. 58). Laurence is sincere in her appraisal of Jean-Charles yet readers enjoy a wry smile at her expense when they read: '«le côté convulsif des femmes», dit Jean-Charles qui est pourtant féministe' (p. 44). Again, readers 'know' that Laurence is wrong when she asserts: 'On ne peut pas prendre la responsabilité de tout ce qu'on fait — ne fait pas. «Qu'est-ce que tu fais pour eux?» Ces comptes exigés soudain dans un monde où rien ne compte tellement. C'est comme un abus' (p. 136). We are invited to judge her negatively. The same is true when her *mauvaise foi* is revealed: 'La psychologue dirait qu'elle fait exprès de se rendre malade... Absurde. Si *vraiment* elle ne voulait pas, elle refuserait, elle se battrait' (p. 175). [Emphasis added.] I believe that modern (women) readers tend to resist the invitation to 'condemn' Laurence for her apparent failings and are more likely to sympathise and identify with her, perhaps even considering that the implied author is somehow taking an unfair advantage.

There is a further group of utterances whose status is ambiguous in that it is impossible to know whether the irony, which is clearly intended, is the narrator's or the implied author's. Are we being invited to direct our criticism with Laurence (narrator) or at her when she refers to books not by their title but by the prize they have won? 'Sur un guéridon à côté d'elle, il y a des revues - *Réalité, L'Express, Candide, Votre Jardin* - et quelques livres : le Goncourt, le Renaudot' (p. 91). We wonder if Laurence is sincere when she repeats what 'everyone' knows about the condition of the working class, 'qui n'est pas ce qu'elle doit être [...] bien qu'avec les allocations familiales ils aient presque tous une machine à laver, la télé, et *même* une auto' (p. 73). [Emphasis added.] Is Laurence aware of the irony when she repeatedly refers to *le coin «relaxe-silence»* in her mother's apartment, even as she is describing Dominique's distress?³⁴ A similar

³⁴ See pp. 49, 50, 58, 100.

ambiguity adheres to the more playful remark prompted by Jean-Charles' response to the kaleidoscope, so out of key with Laurence's and the children's, to the effect that it would be an excellent tool for designers of fabrics and wallpaper. The status of the unfinished observation, 'dix idées à la minute...' (p. 38). is unclear. If it belongs to Laurence the character, is she being sincere or ironic? Does it express the indulgence or distanced derision of the narrator? Is the irony then the implied author's? The cumulative effect of this ambiguity is, yet again, to deprive readers of any firm foothold, a secure place from where they can make judgements.

Enumeration is also related to the questioning of meaning and the undermining of our confidence in language in *Les Belles Images*. The use of lists is one of the most striking features of the text. The text is so dominated by enumeration that this strategy could almost be described as a textual 'tic'. There are examples on virtually every page of the book.³⁵ This is perhaps quite natural, given the premise that a sign never means one thing only. As Laurence reflects when she receives a bouquet from Jean-Charles, 'un bouquet, c'est toujours autre chose que des fleurs : c'est de l'amitié, de l'espoir, de la gratitude, de la gaieté' (p. 136). Conversely, given the inadequacies of language, one word is not enough to convey meaning. Interesting theoretical work has been done on enumeration by Béatrice Damamme.³⁶ She has shown how enumeration can work to create an impression of uncertainty, of groping towards true meaning/ the right term. In *Les Belles Images*, adjectives, verbs and nouns are multiplied. There is an interesting example of this in the final pages of the book; Laurence is depressed and finding it painful to come to terms with her parents' reconciliation and, in particular, to square her

³⁵ Indeed, it is characteristic of much of Simone de Beauvoir's writing as a whole. Claire Cayron discusses the pleasure Simone de Beauvoir derives from enumeration in *La Nature chez Simone de Beauvoir*, Paris: Gallimard, 1973, pp. 163-68.

³⁶ Damamme, Béatrice, 'Réflexions sur le rôle des démarcateurs de coordination dans les énumérations littéraires', *Le Français Moderne: Revue de Linguistique Française*, 49(1), January 1981, 20-35.

mother's present self-satisfaction with the distress she had been feeling. The synonymy of the terms in the two parallel lists is evocative: 'On crie, on pleure, on se convulse comme s'il y avait dans la vie quelque chose digne de ces cris, ces larmes, ces agitations' (p. 177). Spaces are created between the different terms and meaning reverberates there, as in a sound box; it is the outcome of the interaction between them, more than the sum of the individual words that are themselves deficient. Enumerations in *Les Belles Images* embody the displacement and deferral of meaning.

An important aspect of Simone de Beauvoir's use of lists is rhythm. It is a useful criterion for the selection of quotations to illustrate my contention that enumeration can challenge our confidence in words/ language/ meaning by the way in which synonymous and antonymous terms are linked. Furthermore, it will be useful to examine these enumerations in the light of the theoretical work done by Madelene Frédéric.³⁷ She has shown how enumerations slip almost imperceptibly from highly organised, tightly structured formulations at one end of the spectrum to what she terms 'énumérations chaotiques' at the other. According to her classification, most of the enumerations we are dealing with in *Les Belles Images* were towards or belong in the disordered category, possessing either a vague synthesizing expression ('formule synthétique') that sums up the terms that make up the enumeration or none at all and frequently linking heterogeneous elements.³⁸ This is in keeping with the 'madness' of

³⁷ Frédéric, Madeleine, 'Énumération, énumération homologique, énumération chaotique: essai de caractérisation', in *Stylistique, rhétorique et poétique dans les langues romanes*, Actes du XVII^e Congrès international de linguistique et de philologie romanes, (Aix-en-Provence, 1983), vol 8, Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence, 1986, 104-17.

³⁸ Frédéric gives the following definition of 'formule synthétique': 'un terme ou un groupe de termes dont le contenu sémantique recouvre celui de l'ensemble ou d'une partie seulement des termes/ des syntagmes constituant la série' (p. 106). Among the examples she gives of vague synthesizing expressions are those that include the word 'chose' (see p. 108). A classic example with 'chose' occurs in *Les Belles images* on p. 81: '[Catherine] apprend des choses qui ne s'enseignent pas en classe: compatir, consoler, recevoir et donner, percevoir sur les visages et dans les voix des nuances qui lui échappaient'. 'Tout' is another such expression. See the following quotation that begins: 'Tout était net, frais parfait [...]']'.

the text. Towards the beginning of *Les Belles Images* we find the following striking examples of enumeration; describing the early days of her relationship with Jean-Charles, Laurence says:

Tout était net, frais, parfait: l'eau bleue de la piscine, le bruit luxueux des balles de tennis, les blanches aiguilles de pierre, les nuages roulés en boule dans le ciel lisse, l'odeur des sapins [...]. Dans le parc de l'hôtel, les garçons et les filles en clairs vêtements, la peau hâlée, polis par le soleil comme de beaux galets. Et Laurence et Jean-Charles de clair vêtus, hâlés, polis. Soudain un soir, au retour d'une promenade, dans la voiture arrêtée, sa bouche sur ma bouche, cet embrasement, ce vertige. Alors, pendant des jours et des semaines, je n'ai plus été une image, mais chair et sang, désir, plaisir.

(*Les Belles Images*, p. 22.)

The quotation begins with an enumeration of three closely related adjectives, none of them alone sufficient to convey the meaning which emerges from the gaps between them. Then follows a list of objects, of which I will say more later. The next enumeration, 'de clair vêtus, hâlés, polis', made up of three past participles, echoes and condenses the description of the view from Laurence's window. The text reaches a crescendo here as Jean-Charles is about to kiss Laurence for the first time, a kiss expressed by a further enumeration, communicating a sense of urgency. In the final enumeration - 'chair et sang, désir, plaisir' - rhythm underlines the sensuality of their relationship. The rhythm and movement of this passage can be interpreted as a surge of semiotic energy in the text, providing the kind of polymorphic/ polyphonic pleasure that Kristeva links to the *chora*. Semiotic energy is apparent later in the text when Laurence's ecstatic, giddy response to the dancing of a Greek child and the intensity of her experience is suggested by a list of past participles: 'Transportée par la musique, éblouie, grisée, transfigurée, éperdue' (p. 158). The effect is reinforced by the way in which these terms echo and reinforce each other. Use of rhythm is also interesting as Laurence seems to reach the lowest point in her breakdown; there are, in fact, five parallel lists here, whose rhythms convey, not only her panic and despair, but also her

confusion in the face of such complexity; feelings shared by readers who sink down with Laurence into the seemingly impenetrable/ enveloping mass created by the lists before experiencing the dawning of hope as the rhythm of the final list rises up, lifts Laurence and readers to a point beyond despair:

Ils la forceront à manger, ils lui feront tout avaler; tout quoi? tout ce qu'elle vomit, sa vie, celle des autres avec leurs fausses amours, leurs histoires d'argent, leurs mensonges. Ils la guériront de ses refus, de son désespoir. [...] Qu'a-t-on fait de moi? Cette femme qui n'aime personne, insensible aux beautés du monde, incapable même de pleurer, cette femme que je vomis. Catherine [...] peut-être elle s'en sortira... De quoi? De cette nuit. De l'ignorance, de l'indifférence. Catherine... Elle se redresse soudain.

(*Les Belles Images*, pp. 180-81.)

Reading this, it seems to me that the text also reproduces Laurence's experience of breathlessness for readers. The semiotic energy that Kristeva identifies as erupting in Céline's verse as 'panting', 'breathlessness and 'acceleration' of pace erupts in the text of *Les Belles Images* as Laurence confronts breakdown and madness. Such lists within lists, lists upon lists, are a common feature of *Les Belles Images*. Elsewhere in the text, it is a technique used to portray the advertising industry and the psychological motivations it appeals to. Here, the use of parallel lists suggests not only complexity but also excess and duplicity. Note the series of synonyms that begins the following quotation and the linking of divergent elements in the final list: 'Le lisse, le brillant, le luisant, rêve de glissement, de perfection glacée; valeurs de l'érotisme et valeurs de l'enfance (innocence); vitesse, domination, chaleur, sécurité'(p. 42).

Enumeration is a supple tool that Simone de Beauvoir uses skillfully in *Les Belles Images* to communicate Laurence's mood. Compare respectively the joy, determination, wistfulness and bitterness in the following quotations. Assonance and alliteration reinforce the childlike sense of happiness evoked when Laurence and her daughters look in a kaleidoscope: '[...] enchantement des couleurs et des formes qui se

font, se défont, papillotent et se multiplient dans la fuyante symétrie d'un octogone' (p. 37). When Laurence is remembering her first breakdown and trying to convince herself that it will not happen again, a series of verbs together with the repetition of 'je suis' conveys her determination: 'Je ne retomberai pas. Maintenant je suis prévenue, je suis armée, je me tiens en main' (p. 44). Repetition combines with enumeration again to express Laurence's wistfulness when she is shopping for Christmas presents: '[...] une veste en daim d'une couleur indéfinissable: couleur de brume, couleur du temps, couleur des robes de Peau-d'Ane' (p. 139). The jacket is at once all and none of these colours. She does not buy the jacket but allows Jean-Charles to choose a necklace for her. Her tone is bitter as she realises what the gift represents: 'C'est une compensation, un symbole, un succédané' (p. 140). Here too the use of a series of quasi-synonyms reminds us of the inadequacy of words. Alliteration intensifies the effect.

All of the examples I have quoted are what Béatrice Damamme refers to as open enumerations. That is, the final term of the enumeration is not preceded by an 'and' which would give an impression of finality/ completion, of closure. Without an 'and' we feel the list could go on. This openness, this inconclusiveness is characteristic of *Les Belles Images* as a whole and corresponds well with Laurence's frame of mind. It also deprives readers, who are dependent on Laurence's narrative, of any certainty. The lack of closure in Simone de Beauvoir's text is an instance of her radical writing practice.

Lists can also create a sense of meaninglessness, deprive reality of its seriousness so that it seems unreal. This is most strikingly the case when it is a matter of lists of catastrophes and the process of detachment is explicated in the text:

Les horreurs du monde, on est forcé de s'y habituer, il y en a trop: le gavage des oies, l'excision, les lynchages, les avortements, les suicides, les enfants martyres, les maisons de la mort, les massacres d'otages, les répressions, on voit ça au cinéma, à la télé, on passe.

(*Les Belles Images*, p. 30.)

Cadavres sanglants de Blancs, de Noirs, des autocars renversés dans des ravins, vingt-cinq enfants tués, d'autres coupés en deux, des incendies, des carcasses d'avions fracassés, cent dix passagers morts sur le coup, des cyclones, des inondations, des pays entiers dévastés, des villages en flammes, des émeutes raciales, des guerres locales, des défilés de réfugiés hagards. C'était si lugubre qu'à la fin on avait presque envie de rire. [...] On n'aperçoit que des images, proprement encadrées sur le petit écran et qui n'ont pas leur poids de réalité.

(*Les Belles Images*, p. 147.)

Laurence's latent response to the review of the year's events, hysterical laughter, might easily be replicated by readers in response to the transcribed catalogue of disasters. Enumeration is certainly used as a vehicle for humour in *Les Belles Images*.³⁹ Elizabeth Fallaize has drawn attention to the comic subversion that operates when Jean-Charles conjures up a picture of the future: 'les déserts se sont couverts de blé, de légumes, de fruits, toute la terre est devenue la terre promise; gavés de lait, de riz, de tomates et d'oranges, tous les enfants souriaient' (pp. 30-31).⁴⁰ Laurence lists the titles of books she sees in a shop window; included in the high-sounding list of eleven titles that could go on (it 'ends' with an ellipsis) we find '*Une nouvelle classe ouvrière, Une classe ouvrière nouvelle*' (p. 73). A comic repetition and reversal. Laurence our narrator detaches herself from her world in order to mock it and, by extension, herself. Self-parody is characteristic of the text. Can humour be defined as transgressive? To what extent can humour be considered mad? Is there something slightly 'hysterical' in the burlesque description of Laurence's relationship with Lucien, for example? This is what she says:

Ensuite, que d'agitation! Il me poursuivait, il pleurait, je cédaï, il rompaï, je souffraï, je cherchaï partout la Julietta rouge, je me pendaï au téléphone, il revenaï, il suppliaï: quitte ton mari, non jamais mais je t'aime, il m'insultaï, il

³⁹ It has been suggested that from a certain length, all enumerations may be comic, whatever the subject matter. See Barbara C. Bowen's comment during the discussion that follows Francis Bar's paper 'Répétition et énumération chez les auteurs burlesques du XVII^e siècle', reported in *Actes du colloque organisé par l'Institut d'études romanes et le Centre de civilisation de l'Université de Varsovie*, 1981, pp. 163-86 (p. 186).

⁴⁰ Fallaize, *The Novels*, p. 126.

repartait, j'attendais, j'espérais, je désespérais, nous nous retrouvions, quel bonheur, j'ai tant souffert sans toi, et moi sans toi: avoue tout à ton mari, jamais...
(*Les Belles Images*, p. 32.)

It is revealing to compare this hyperbole used to portray the early days of their relationship once Laurence has become disillusioned, with the language/ the enumeration used to convey her awareness of well-being at that time. We read: 'J'écraserais mes remords, si c'était comme avant; le trouble qui foudroie, la nuit qui flambe, tourbillons et avalanches de désirs et de délices: pour ces métamorphoses on peut trahir, mentir, tout risquer' (p. 63). The brittle nature of this hyperbole and Laurence's bitter disappointment are exposed shortly afterwards when she recalls that even last Christmas '[...] du moins il y avait quelque chose à regretter, quelque chose au monde qui valait son poids de chagrin', and she envies Lucien: 'Il connaît encore cette fièvre, et le désespoir, et l'espoir. Il a plus de chance que moi' (p. 65). It is interesting to note the closure of this list by the use of 'and'. Exceptionally, the impression we have is one of finality. Laurence has not been able to maintain the jolly front behind which she had tried to hide her emptiness from herself.

Her feelings of remoteness become more acute in Greece. Lists of objects in the museum in Athens reproduce in readers the indifference and boredom of Laurence who remembers that she 'coulai[t] à pic, dans un gouffre d'indifférence' and that her 'ennui s'exaspérait jusqu'à l'angoisse' (p. 167). Her feelings of suffocation are experienced by readers who can feel smothered by the lists of objects which are so typical of the text and which are sometimes very lengthy indeed: lists of food (p. 8); furniture (p. 45); furniture and clothes (p. 58); books (pp. 72-73); drinks (p. 90); magazines (p. 92); objects in shop windows (pp. 137-38), which take up twenty-one lines. These lists convey a sense of over abundance and leave 'no space to breathe'. Clearly they mirror the world in which Laurence lives and reflect its materialistic values.

A further interesting effect of these lists of objects is to slow down the text. They pin down the text on a temporal level, literally make time stand still. There is something obsessional in Laurence's apparent compulsion to catalogue her environment, perhaps in an attempt to gain some semblance of control over it. The text relentlessly traps readers in the narrator's obsession. Reading long inventories, I am also reminded of Simone de Beauvoir's express desire, apparently repudiated when she met Sartre, to 'say it all': '«je dirais tout»' she wrote in *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*.⁴¹

The feelings of suffocation I have mentioned are effectively reinforced by the use of repetition, an equally striking characteristic of Simone de Beauvoir's textual practice in *Les Belles Images*. I have identified forty-four words, expressions, sentences, dialogues and constructions that are repeated throughout the text, sometimes up to six times. This use of repetition creates a dense web of utterances and duplicates Laurence's feelings of entrapment. Utterances reverberate throughout the narrative like mirror images, *en abyme*, reflections of reflections of reflections. The text structures an obsessive situation. In Freudian terms the text itself can be described as neurotic as repetition is neurotic or, to be more precise, neurosis is repetition. Freud argued that the neurotic 'repeats instead of remembering'. Therapy involves converting repetition into remembrance.⁴² The final chapter of *Les Belles Images* can be read as an attempt to

⁴¹ See *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, p. 481. The incident in the Luxembourg Gardens when Sartre 'defeats' Simone de Beauvoir, leading her to abandon her project of saying/ telling everything, is discussed by Moi in *Simone de Beauvoir*, pp. 15-17. (Note that the use of the conditional tense undercuts the possibility of saying/ telling it all.)

⁴² 'Remembering, Repeating and Working Through', *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, London: The Hogarth Press, 1958, Volume XII (1911-1913), pp. 147-56 (p. 151). My reading accords with Simone de Beauvoir's reference to the discoveries of psychoanalysis in *Existentialisme et la sagesse des nations*: 'Il pourrait sembler inutile et même néfaste de révéler à un adolescent qu'il hait son père; mais s'il n'a pas avoué cette haine avec des mots, il ne l'a pas moins affirmée dans ses sentiments, ses conduites, ses rêves, ses angoisses; le psychanalyste ne choisit pas de découvrir gratuitement et brutalement une vérité ignorée; il essaie d'aider son malade à modifier les conduites par lesquelles il réagit à cette réalité; au lieu d'employer ses forces à se dissimuler sa haine, il faut que le sujet s'en libère, non en la niant, mais en l'assumant et en la dépassant; ce qui exige d'abord qu'il la reconnaisse explicitement et la comprenne' (pp. 48-49).

remember. Furthermore, repetition can evoke a sense of unreality, duplicating Laurence's experience for readers. I suggest that readers who encounter such extensive repetition will inevitably become self conscious as readers, that is, they will distance themselves from the fictional world of the text and in this way experience Laurence's alienation.

It will be useful to quote in full two of the series of repetitions, so as to illustrate just how dense the text can become. Early in the narrative we read:

Juste en ce moment, dans un autre jardin, tout à fait différent, exactement pareil, quelqu'un dit ces mots et le même sourire se pose sur un autre visage. (p. 7.)

A few pages later we find:

Dans un autre jardin, tout à fait différent, exactement pareil, quelqu'un dit [...] (p. 9.)

Again, some forty pages later we read:

(Dans un autre salon, tout à fait différent, exactement pareil, avec des vases pleins de fleurs luxueuses, le même cri sort d'une autre bouche :« Salaud!») (p. 50.)

This recalls:

(Est-ce qu'en cet instant, dans un autre coin de la galaxie, un autre Lucien, une autre Laurence disent les mêmes mots?) (p. 32.)

which is echoed later in the text:

Mais la voix nostalgique fait lever en elle comme un écho brouillé de quelque chose vécu jadis, dans une autre vie, ou peut-être en ce moment, sur une autre planète. (p. 60.)

All of these quotations are echoed again when Laurence says:

Juste à cette minute, des tas d'amants sont en train de rompre [...]. (p. 110.)

(Une autre jeune femme, des centaines de jeunes femmes en cette minute se demandent : pourquoi lui plutôt qu'un autre?) (p. 137.)

This last quotation links with another series of repetitions:

«Pourquoi Jean-Charles plutôt que Lucien?» [...] (Pourquoi moi plutôt qu'une autre?) (p. 65.)

Pourquoi Jean-Charles plutôt que Lucien? [...] Pourquoi un homme plutôt qu'un autre? (p. 66.)

Pourquoi Jean-Charles plutôt qu'un autre? (p. 137.)

Grouping repeated utterances in this way, illustrates just how weighted down the text of *Les Belles Images* is. One series of repetitions is echoed by another. Moreover, the word 'salaud' which appears in the series just quoted, ricochets through the text, repeated thirteen other times on four different occasions. Certain words are concentrated in a particular section of the work; lies and lying are repeated six times in the final third of *Les Belles Images*.⁴³ As Laurence comes to see more clearly through the glossy veneer of the world in which she lives, her rejection of it becomes more and more vehement and 'no' reverberates throughout the last part of the text, building to a crescendo when Laurence, unable to deny her true feelings any longer, finds her voice and screams her refusal to comply.

Non. Je ne voulais pas. [...] Je refusais de l'oublier, [...] je refusais qu'un jour elle ressemblât à sa mère[...].(p. 158.)

La psychologue dirait qu'elle fait exprès de se rendre malade parce qu'elle ne veut pas emmener Catherine. Absurde. Si vraiment elle ne voulait pas, elle refuserait, elle se battrait. (p. 175.)

Non. Non. (p. 179.)

Non, jamais! Je ne me laisserai pas manipuler. Elle crie : -Non! Non! [...] Non. Pourquoi non? [...] "Non"; elle a crié tout haut. (p. 180.)

Here Simone de Beauvoir is also using repetition to make explicit the connections between Laurence, Catherine and the little Greek girl. Another series of repetitions develops further the identification of Laurence with Catherine:

⁴³ See p. 136 'mensonger'; p. 139 'mensonge'; p. 140 'mensonge'; p. 168 'la chaine de mensonges'; p. 180 'il parlerait à cette radio qu'il accusait de mensonge'; p. 180 'leurs mensonges'. (Laurence herself lies a number of times in the narrative; to Catherine about Jean-Charles's work p. 29 and to Jean-Charles, not only about Lucien, but also about Goya's Christmas bonus, p. 128; about the number of times Catherine has cried at night, p. 129 (cf. p. 135); about having eaten, p. 137.)

C'est toi [Laurence] qui la [Catherine] détraque avec tes scrupules, ta sensiblerie. (p. 133.)

Sous prétexte de guérir Catherine de cette "sensiblerie" qui inquiétait Jean-Charles, on allait la mutiler. (p. 159.)

Donc à Pâques - elle sera guérie, bien sûr [Laurence]. (p. 175.)

Ils la [Laurence] guériront de ses refus, de son désespoir. (p. 180.)

This repetition and series of identifications reflect Laurence's disintegrating sense of self and accentuate readers' discomfort as regards the narrator's identity. They are placed in the painful position of depending on a narrator who is not only unreliable, but whose personality is disintegrating.

Clearly, each time words reappear their meaning is transformed, embedded as they are in different contexts.⁴⁴ Thus the whole process of undermining our confidence in fixed meaning is reinforced. When Laurence learns from her mother that her parents intend to live together again, news which she finds utterly painful,⁴⁵ she recalls the words Gilbert had spoken when he told her that he was about to reject her mother; his words have acquired new layers of significance and are recalled by Laurence to refer to both herself and her mother with bitter irony:

— On supporte, on supporte, dit Gilbert. (p. 47.)

"On supporte, on supporte." Gilbert avait raison. (p. 177.)

The text underlines the ambivalence of even apparently straightforward words such as the term which means to force feed that is used to designate four very different situations:

⁴⁴ Kristeva follows Vološinov to argue that all meaning is contextual. Context does not allow us to determine/ close the meaning of a text as context itself cannot be fixed. Derrida has shown how every text possesses a number of different contexts. See *Moi, Sexual/ Textual Politics*, p. 155.

⁴⁵ Repetition of what Dominique said to Laurence underlines the acute pain she feels. This is further reinforced by the use of direct speech. Laurence is 'hearing' her mother's voice in her mind.

"Tu n'imagines pas le plaisir que ça lui a fait." (Dominique, p. 177.)

"Tu n'imagines pas le plaisir que ça lui a fait." (Laurence, p. 180.)

le gavage des oies (p. 30.)

gavés de lait, de riz, de tomates et d'oranges (p. 31.)

se gavant de glace (p. 38.)

Elle se gave de tranquillisants (p. 143.)

The horrific present is linked with Jean-Charles's utopic vision of the future which is linked with an apparently idyllic family meal which is in turn linked with Dominique's pain and despair. The resonance of this series of repetitions is intensified by the central importance of food and eating in the symbolic landscape in *Les Belles Images*. The term 'se gaver' is remindful of Laurence's plight, or rather, her words as she lies in bed will recall these earlier instances of force feeding: 'Ils la forceront à manger, ils lui feront tout avaler [...].'(p. 180).

Also in relation to meaning, it is interesting to note how repetition in *Les Belles Images* is used to confer symbolic significance on certain words. Paradoxically, through repetition, words can not only lose their meaning but also come to mean more than themselves. Simone de Beauvoir's choice of such objects as banal as a safety pin suggests she wished to challenge accepted notions of objects worthy of symbolic status. In the text the safety pin comes to stand for the true friendship that Laurence has never known and which Jean-Charles believes to be inappropriate:

J'ai allumé, Brigitte s'est levée : «Bonjour, m'dame.» J'ai tout de suite remarqué la grosse épingle de nourrice plantée dans l'ourlet de sa jupe. (p. 53.)

Laissez-moi au moins arranger l'épingle. (p. 55.)

[...] l'épingle était encore plantée dans la jupe de Brigitte. (p. 78.)

Je revois Brigitte, l'épingle fichée dans son ourlet : "Bonjour, m'dame" [...].(p. 172.)

Subtle changes, when utterances are echoed rather than repeated, can be extremely eloquent; they are an economical way of marking the progression in

Laurence's frame of mind. The nature of her uncertainty changes. Early in the text we read:

(mais qu'ont-ils que je n'ai pas non plus?) (p. 14.)

And then:

Et de nouveau Laurence se demande : qu'ont-ils que je n'ai pas? (p. 19.)

This becomes:

Il me manque quelque chose que les autres ont... A moins... A moins qu'ils ne l'aient pas non plus. (p. 83.)

Then, finally:

Est-ce moi qui suis anormale? une anxieuse, une angoissée : qu'est-ce que j'ai qu'ils n'ont pas? (p. 150.)

Repetition underlines Laurence's revision of her position; she moves from uncertainty through tentative doubt/hope to certainty:

Ce secret qu'elle se reprochait de n'avoir pas su découvrir, peut-être qu'après tout il n'existait pas. Il n'existait pas : elle le sait depuis la Grèce. (p. 179.)

There is a similar progression with regard to her perception of Jean-Charles. It centres around his reaction to the car accident when Laurence swerves to avoid a young cyclist.

Words echo in the text as they echo in Laurence's mind, replicating her obsession.

La voiture est en miettes. (p. 102.)

«Je ne trouve vraiment pas ça malin; nous n'avons qu'une assurance tierce-collision.» [...] Tout le monde aurait témoigné en ta faveur. Il a dit ça sans en penser un mot [...]. (p. 103.)

«La voiture est en miettes.» (p. 109.)

«Je ne trouve ça vraiment pas malin; nous n'avons qu'une assurance tierce-collision... Tout le monde aurait témoigné en ta faveur.» Et elle réalise en un éclair qu'il ne plaisait pas. (p. 134.)

«Jean-Charles ne plaisait pas.» Combien de fois s'est-elle répété cette phrase pendant cette semaine? Elle se la répète encore. (p. 150.)

As Laurence tells her story her feelings change and she becomes gradually more aware of her true feelings:

Mais si, je l'aime bien. [Gilbert] (L'aime-t-elle ou non? elle aime tout le monde.) (p. 18.)

«J'ai toujours détesté Gilbert.» (p. 48.)

Mais non. Je l'aime bien. [Lucien] Je vais rompre avec lui, mais je l'aime bien. J'aime bien tout le monde. Sauf Gilbert. (p. 87.)

[...] incapable d'aimer. (p. 176.)

Qu'a-t-on fait de moi? Cette femme qui n'aime personne [...] incapable même de pleurer [...]. (p. 181.)⁴⁶

This progression also undermines any notion of truth as an absolute. Just as meanings are never fixed once and for all, truth can never be immutable. It is not so much that Laurence moves from a position of ignorance/ error to knowledge and truth but that what is true changes.

At the height of Laurence's crisis, repitition underlines connections between the past and the present. 'J'ai été *déçue*' (p. 179). becomes 'Je suis *déçue*' (p. 180). The words in Laurence's head are voiced: 'Je ne permettrai pas qu'on lui fasse ce qu'on m'a fait' (pp. 180-81). becomes '— On ne lui fera pas ce qu'on m'a fait' (p. 181).

Repetition exemplifies Laurence's powerlessness, the trap in which she is caught. However profound her disagreements with Jean-Charles, there is no way out: 'Quoi qu'il fasse, ou dise, quoi qu'elle dise ou fasse, il n'y aura pas de sanction' (p. 137). This repetition combined with reversal suggests the net in which Laurence is caught. The hopelessness of her predicament is evoked by the repetition that occurs when she wonders why she decided to end her relationship with Lucien: 'Pourquoi avait-elle décidé de faire le vide dans sa vie, d'épargner son temps, ses forces, son coeur

⁴⁶ The reader also recalls what Laurence said earlier: 'Moi aussi, à son âge, je pleurais: comme j'ai pleuré! C'est peut-être pour ça que je ne pleure plus jamais' (p. 25).

alors qu'elle ne sait trop quoi faire de son temps, ses forces, son coeur?' (p. 146). The repetition of the terms 'trop', 'vide' and 'remplie' in apparent disorder in the next sentences exemplifies Laurence's befuddlement: 'Vie trop remplie? trop vide? Remplie de choses vides. Quelle confusion!' (p. 146).

A further, specific use of repetition in *Les Belles Images* occurs particularly in the early part of the book. Laurence, alienated and unsure of herself, echoes those around her, holding onto the language of others in an attempt to anchor herself, gain some semblance of stability. Sometimes this echoing/ imitation is conspicuous:

Merveilleuse, dit Marthe avec ferveur.
Merveilleuse, répète Laurence. (p. 14.)

-Un week-end vraiment réussi! dit Jean-Charles.
-Vraiment réussi. (p. 19.)

At other times, it is less foregrounded. For example, at Feuverolles Laurence unwittingly echoes Dominique though she has just been irritated by her mother's phraseology; 'C'est d'un banal...', applied by Dominique to Florence and Granada twenty years earlier, is now used in connection with Saint-Tropez and echoed by Laurence in her comment on the Paris suburbs, 'c'est d'un déprimant!' (p. 10).⁴⁷ When Laurence goes to Dominique who has been physically maltreated by Gilbert, her words are a direct echo of those used by her colleague, Mona, with regard to aggressive male drivers, 'ce sont des brutes' (pp. 86 and 124). Once, when speaking to Mona, she becomes aware of what she is doing and stops herself:

Elle allait dire machinalement : indispensable, elle s'est reprise à temps. Elle entend la voix de Gilbert : «Une détente indispensable» [...]. (p. 69.)

Laurence's behaviour is especially interesting in the light of the way the text explicitly and insistently associates imitating with Dominique:

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Fallaize also discusses this example. *The Novels*, pp. 126-27.

- Qui imite-t-elle en ce moment? C'est une scie, entre eux, cette question que posait Freud à propos d'une hystérique. Le fait est que Dominique imite toujours quelqu'un. (p. 34.)

[...] (qui imite-t-elle?). (p. 88.)

Imitant toujours quelqu'un faute de savoir inventer des conduites adaptées aux circonstances. (p. 125.)

Qui imitait-elle? la femme qu'elle souhaitait devenir? (p. 176.)

Laurence, like Dominique, lacking any inner conviction about who she is and how she should be, looks to her entourage in search of models. She echoes and imitates others as the text echoes and imitates itself.

I have shown how language in *Les Belles Images* is used to reproduce Laurence's breakdown. Enumeration and repetition mediate her feelings of alienation, strangeness, indifference, boredom, and suffocation. They mirror Laurence's uncertainty and her disintegrating sense of identity. The text duplicates her obsession and is, itself, neurotic. And above all, the text epitomises her loss of faith in language. In Laurence's universe the meaningfulness of language cannot be taken for granted. Readers who are invited to interpret a loss of confidence in language as a symptom of breakdown and madness, a sign of failure and guilt, find themselves placed in this same position. In the mad textual universe created by Simone de Beauvoir, readers are trapped in an uncomfortable place where they share Laurence's distress.

Simone de Beauvoir is generally perceived to produce texts which are *lisible*/ readerly. Yet a close reading of her texts does not corroborate this view. *Les Belles Images* demonstrates the intrinsic inadequacy of language. Language will not submit to control and meaning remains fluid. Simone de Beauvoir's texts have much in common with texts which are *scriptible*/ writerly. Indeed, her texts undermine the *lisible*/

scriptible opposition. Simone de Beauvoir crosses the *écrivain/ écrivant* boundary.

Conclusion

It has clearly emerged that far from being flat, detached and controlled, Simone de Beauvoir's writing is frequently inflected by forceful emotions and disrupted.¹ Madness is enacted in the text of her fiction, duplicated by textual strategies. It is inherent in the text in those qualities that destabilise meaning and identity, that represent chaos. Marks of excess, plurality, disruption and transgression are an inscription of madness at a discursive level. In Simone de Beauvoir's fiction, symbolic language is disrupted by the semiotic.

Madness is inscribed in the text of *L'Invitée* as excess, hyperbole and ambiguity. In this work, language is taken to the limits of expressibility. The realist novel is embedded in a Gothic textual universe that Simone de Beauvoir creates to be the space in which she confronts pain and madness. Gothic conventions and figures inform the novel to an extent that makes it justifiable to speak of the Gothic economy of the text. In *L'Invitée*, as in the Gothic mode, feeling and emotion exceed reason, and ambivalence and ambiguity prevail. In so far as the text is Gothic and transgressive it is mad, it enacts madness.

¹ It is true that in her oeuvre as a whole, variations in tone are considerable. Toril Moi argues convincingly that the range in tone of Simone de Beauvoir's writings (vital to lifeless) is related to the 'degree of disavowal she engages in'. *Simone de Beauvoir*, pp. 249-52. My readings of *L'Invitée*, *Les Belles images* and *La Femme rompue* are in complete opposition to those such as Susan Marie Loffredo's. She contends that 'Beauvoir's fiction is written unambiguously, both in terms of action and chronology' and that 'her skillfully and coolly controlled prose' does not fit situations where emotional control is lost. See 'A Portrait of the Sexes: The Masculine and the Feminine in the Novels of Simone de Beauvoir, Marguerite Duras and Christiane Rochefort', unpublished doctoral dissertation, Princeton University, 1978, pp. 280-81. See also Evans, *Masks of Tradition*, p. 92 where she refers to the 'flatness' of Simone de Beauvoir's prose and pp. 99-100 where she discusses the 'no-frills quality' of her style. She quotes approvingly, Jacques Ehrmann's view that Simone de Beauvoir always maintains 'her distance, her self-control and an entire lucidity'. 'Simone de Beauvoir and the related destinies of woman and intellectual', *Yale French Studies*, 27, 1961, 26-32 (p. 29.) As I recorded in my Introduction, Brosman defines the tone of *Les Belles images* as 'detached', p. 86.

Simone de Beauvoir's imagery is an imagery of madness, an expression of the pain and distress of madness, the evocation of lost plenitude. Networks of images in *L'Invitée*, *Les Belles Images* and *La Femme rompue* mediate madness in the text. Madness experienced as dissolution and loss of self is suggested by interlocking patterns of images. Feelings of abandonment and loss that threaten the self are evoked by images of the void and nothingness that combine the motifs of the abyss, vertigo and falling. Images of collapse and engulfment also evoke fear and sense of loss of self. These are apocalyptic images of submergence, weight, enclosure, immobilisation, imprisonment and live burial. The forceful sense of helplessness and suffering and fear communicated by these images, is amplified by images of death and paralysis. Emphasis on black in all the texts contributes to the pervasive atmosphere of pain and despair. Light, too, is associated with pain. Violent, cruel images predominate in all three texts. Emotional and physical suffering is evoked by images of tearing, burning, biting, sharpness, cutting, stabbing and breaking. An imagery of mirrors, reflections, images, and the gaze of others forms a dense network of symbolisation. These images figure the frail line that divides the real and the illusory and the fragility of the women protagonists' sense of self. The body is a key element of the imagery and symbolic framework of all three books. It is a metaphor for the self, generally a source or expression of pain and disgust. A thread of nostalgic images that evoke a sense of lost well-being and happiness runs through the sombre and desperate weave of the text. Light, water and transparency are recurring motifs. A remarkable affinity exists between the symbolic landscapes of the early and later fiction where excess and hyperbole

persist. It seems apparent that Simone de Beauvoir did not eschew the 'chaos' of metaphor.²

Madness is also located in the text in instability and incoherence. The text reproduces the disintegration of identity experienced by characters threatened by madness and subverts notions of a unified and stable identity. Mirrored characters and unstable narration and focalisation are instrumental in this. Inconclusiveness and ambiguity in the text can also be read as symptoms of madness. Disruptive textual strategies introduce incoherence into the narratives and unsettle meaning. Temporal confusion characterises the later fiction in which the text refuses to convey a sense of chronology, a sense of linear logic. Time in Simone de Beauvoir's novels and short stories is experienced as distorted and reified. Fragmented and interrupted narratives also contribute to the incoherence that exemplifies madness in the text. The use of brackets, dashes, ellipses, ruptures and silences fragment, disrupt and destabilise the text. Multi-layering is a further source of incoherence. Syntax, too, is instrumental in the creation of a mad text. Disarticulated and contorted syntax evokes the pain of Simone de Beauvoir's women protagonists and conveys a sense of claustrophobia and obsession.

In *Les Belles Images* madness is identifiable in the text at those points where language refuses to signify and where the meaningfulness of language is subverted. The use of plural meanings, irony, enumeration and repetition are instrumental in the creation of a mad textual universe where readers' faith in language is undermined and where they share Laurence's 'désarroi'. The text exposes the problematic nature of

² This term is used by Fowler in his comparison of simile and metaphor; metaphor, unlike simile, he argues, 'upsets reality' (p. 223.). The rich networks of images I have uncovered mean that I cannot agree with Martha Noel Evans's argument that Simone de Beauvoir 'banished' metaphor: 'Taking up a position of mastery with respect to her own femaleness, she thus drained her writing of the enriching power of its own vulnerability. The metaphoric language that might have emerged from confusion as its expression and its transcendence was sapped of its vitality and cast aside' (*Masks of Tradition*, p. 100.).

meaning and enacts the inadequacy of language and Laurence's experience of madness. Irony reproduces a sense of alienation and also contributes to the creation of a mad textual universe in that it is a source of ambiguity in the text and an embodiment of the 'treacherous', 'slippery' nature of meaning. Enumeration, too, challenges readers' confidence in words, language and meaning by linking synonymous and antonymous terms. This technique embodies the displacement and deferral of meaning and can even foster meaninglessness and be a source of transgressive humour. Together with repetition, it mediates feelings of alienation, indifference, boredom, and suffocation, mirroring Laurence's uncertainty. Repetition also underlines the ambiguity and ambivalence of language. It exemplifies obsession and powerlessness. Rhythm and movement in the text are an expression of the disrupting presence of semiotic energy.

The closer one gets to Simone de Beauvoir's writing, the more conspicuous its rich complexity becomes. Such writing resists closure. *L'Invitée*, *Les Belles Images* and *La Femme rompue* correspond to Simone de Beauvoir's definition of true fiction:

Un vrai roman ne se laisse donc ni réduire en formules, ni même raconter; on ne peut pas plus en détacher le sens qu'on ne détache un sourire d'un visage. Quoique fait des mots, il existe comme les objets du monde qui débordent tout ce qu'on peut en dire avec des mots.

(*'Littérature et métaphysique'*, p. 107.)

Far from being definitive, my readings of madness in the text open up meaning.

Reading madness in the text is to perceive the ambiguities and contradictions of existence operating there. The insistent voice of madness breaks into the text, disrupting order and logic, demanding to be heard.

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